

# THE HOLY WATERS

INDIAN PSALM-MEDITATIONS

Text by MARTIN KÄMPCHEN  
and woodcuts by JYOTI SAHI





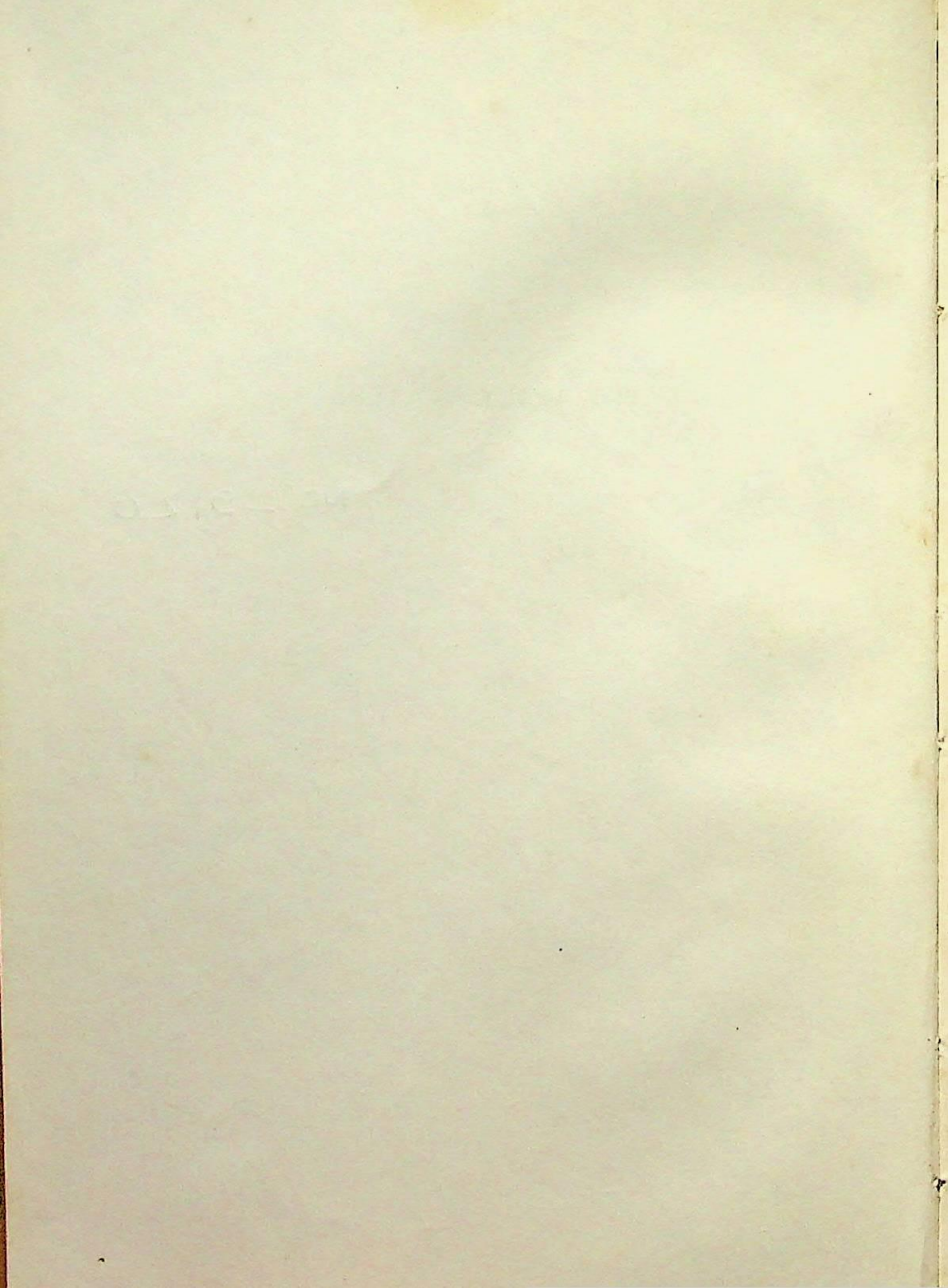




THE HOLY WATERS

No -2120







In memory of Dr. Thomas Sartory  
(† 18-7-1982)



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\* \* \*

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# THE HOLY WATERS

Indian Psalm-Meditations

Text by Martin Kämpchen

Woodcuts by Jyoti Sahi

Translated from German

by Martin Kämpchen



**ASIAN TRADING CORPORATION**

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Jyoti Sahi

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# INDIAN PSALM-MEDITATIONS

## CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	... ix
SPACE (Ākāśa)	... 2
Compassion	... 6
Courage	... 21
AIR (Vāyu)	... 36
Fear	... 39
Fury	... 53
FIRE (Tejas)	... 68
Wonder	... 71
Yearning	... 85
WATER (Āpah)	... 98
Sorrow	... 103
Peace	... 117
EARTH (Prithivī)	... 132
Notes	... 137

MINIATURE MEDICALS

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
SPACE JOURNAL	2
CONTENTS	3
CHANGE	4
ART (1951)	5
ART (1952)	6
ART (1953)	7
ART (1954)	8
ART (1955)	9
ART (1956)	10
ART (1957)	11
ART (1958)	12
ART (1959)	13
ART (1960)	14
ART (1961)	15
ART (1962)	16
ART (1963)	17
ART (1964)	18
ART (1965)	19
ART (1966)	20
ART (1967)	21
ART (1968)	22
ART (1969)	23
ART (1970)	24
ART (1971)	25
ART (1972)	26
ART (1973)	27
ART (1974)	28
ART (1975)	29
ART (1976)	30
ART (1977)	31
ART (1978)	32
ART (1979)	33
ART (1980)	34
ART (1981)	35
ART (1982)	36
ART (1983)	37
ART (1984)	38
ART (1985)	39
ART (1986)	40
ART (1987)	41
ART (1988)	42
ART (1989)	43
ART (1990)	44
ART (1991)	45
ART (1992)	46
ART (1993)	47
ART (1994)	48
ART (1995)	49
ART (1996)	50
ART (1997)	51
ART (1998)	52
ART (1999)	53
ART (2000)	54
ART (2001)	55
ART (2002)	56
ART (2003)	57
ART (2004)	58
ART (2005)	59
ART (2006)	60
ART (2007)	61
ART (2008)	62
ART (2009)	63
ART (2010)	64
ART (2011)	65
ART (2012)	66
ART (2013)	67
ART (2014)	68
ART (2015)	69
ART (2016)	70
ART (2017)	71
ART (2018)	72
ART (2019)	73
ART (2020)	74
ART (2021)	75
ART (2022)	76
ART (2023)	77
ART (2024)	78
ART (2025)	79
ART (2026)	80
ART (2027)	81
ART (2028)	82
ART (2029)	83
ART (2030)	84
ART (2031)	85
ART (2032)	86
ART (2033)	87
ART (2034)	88
ART (2035)	89
ART (2036)	90
ART (2037)	91
ART (2038)	92
ART (2039)	93
ART (2040)	94
ART (2041)	95
ART (2042)	96
ART (2043)	97
ART (2044)	98
ART (2045)	99
ART (2046)	100
ART (2047)	101
ART (2048)	102
ART (2049)	103
ART (2050)	104
ART (2051)	105
ART (2052)	106
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ART (2064)	118
ART (2065)	119
ART (2066)	120
ART (2067)	121
ART (2068)	122
ART (2069)	123
ART (2070)	124
ART (2071)	125
ART (2072)	126
ART (2073)	127
ART (2074)	128
ART (2075)	129
ART (2076)	130
ART (2077)	131
ART (2078)	132
ART (2079)	133
ART (2080)	134
ART (2081)	135
ART (2082)	136
ART (2083)	137
ART (2084)	138
ART (2085)	139
ART (2086)	140
ART (2087)	141
ART (2088)	142
ART (2089)	143
ART (2090)	144
ART (2091)	145
ART (2092)	146
ART (2093)	147
ART (2094)	148
ART (2095)	149
ART (2096)	150
ART (2097)	151
ART (2098)	152
ART (2099)	153
ART (2100)	154
ART (2101)	155
ART (2102)	156
ART (2103)	157
ART (2104)	158
ART (2105)	159
ART (2106)	160
ART (2107)	161
ART (2108)	162
ART (2109)	163
ART (2110)	164
ART (2111)	165
ART (2112)	166
ART (2113)	167
ART (2114)	168
ART (2115)	169
ART (2116)	170
ART (2117)	171
ART (2118)	172
ART (2119)	173
ART (2120)	174
ART (2121)	175
ART (2122)	176
ART (2123)	177
ART (2124)	178
ART (2125)	179
ART (2126)	180
ART (2127)	181
ART (2128)	182
ART (2129)	183
ART (2130)	184
ART (2131)	185
ART (2132)	186
ART (2133)	187
ART (2134)	188
ART (2135)	189
ART (2136)	190
ART (2137)	191
ART (2138)	192
ART (2139)	193
ART (2140)	194
ART (2141)	195
ART (2142)	196
ART (2143)	197
ART (2144)	198
ART (2145)	199
ART (2146)	200
ART (2147)	201
ART (2148)	202
ART (2149)	203
ART (2150)	204
ART (2151)	205
ART (2152)	206
ART (2153)	207
ART (2154)	208
ART (2155)	209
ART (2156)	210
ART (2157)	211
ART (2158)	212
ART (2159)	213
ART (2160)	214
ART (2161)	215
ART (2162)	216
ART (2163)	217
ART (2164)	218
ART (2165)	219
ART (2166)	220
ART (2167)	221
ART (2168)	222
ART (2169)	223
ART (2170)	224
ART (2171)	225
ART (2172)	226
ART (2173)	227
ART (2174)	228
ART (2175)	229
ART (2176)	230
ART (2177)	231
ART (2178)	232
ART (2179)	233
ART (2180)	234
ART (2181)	235
ART (2182)	236
ART (2183)	237
ART (2184)	238
ART (2185)	239
ART (2186)	240
ART (2187)	241
ART (2188)	242
ART (2189)	243
ART (2190)	244
ART (2191)	245
ART (2192)	246
ART (2193)	247
ART (2194)	248
ART (2195)	249
ART (2196)	250
ART (2197)	251
ART (2198)	252
ART (2199)	253
ART (2200)	254
ART (2201)	255
ART (2202)	256
ART (2203)	257
ART (2204)	258
ART (2205)	259
ART (2206)	260
ART (2207)	261
ART (2208)	262
ART (2209)	263
ART (2210)	264
ART (2211)	265
ART (2212)	266
ART (2213)	267
ART (2214)	268
ART (2215)	269
ART (2216)	270
ART (2217)	271
ART (2218)	272
ART (2219)	273
ART (2220)	274
ART (2221)	275
ART (2222)	276
ART (2223)	277
ART (2224)	278
ART (2225)	279
ART (2226)	280
ART (2227)	281
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ART (2231)	285
ART (2232)	286
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ART (2234)	288
ART (2235)	289
ART (2236)	290
ART (2237)	291
ART (2238)	292
ART (2239)	293
ART (2240)	294
ART (2241)	295
ART (2242)	296
ART (2243)	297
ART (2244)	298
ART (2245)	299
ART (2246)	300
ART (2247)	301
ART (2248)	302
ART (2249)	303
ART (2250)	304
ART (2251)	305
ART (2252)	306
ART (2253)	307
ART (2254)	308
ART (2255)	309
ART (2256)	310
ART (2257)	311
ART (2258)	312
ART (2259)	313
ART (2260)	314
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ART (2476)	530
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ART (2478)	532
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ART (2482)	536
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ART (2484)	538
ART (2485)	539



## INTRODUCTION

On religious festivals, such as on full-moon nights, pious people in the villages come together to celebrate these by performing *kirtan*. For hours they repeat the litany of Haré Krishna, Haré Râma which culminates in a sort of ecstasy of feeling and enthusiasm. The men jump up and dance, clapping their hands, clashing cymbals, beating drums; they may form a procession leading to the temple or to another holy place. Most of the night is thus spent in singing and dancing. When I hear the tunes of *kirtan* coming from far away villages, I am reminded of an Old Testament scene: "David and all the House of Israel danced before Yahweh with all their might, singing to the accompaniment of lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets and cymbals." (2 Sam 6, 5). When King David brought back the ark of God, he was filled with spiritual joy, so that he, wearing but a loincloth, whirled before the ark of God, praising God in jubilation. He forgot to show his royal dignity and became a child before God, the Father.

Have the psalms not arisen from situations similar to those I have described in Indian life and in the Old Testament? Scholars hold that the Psalms have been a part of the Israelite cultic life, that they were sung and played at the recurring annual festivals. True, the Psalms are "formal", "uniform", "stereotype" (as scholars

characterise them), but on the lips of the singer they become again and again spontaneous expressions of joy and sorrow, repentance and thanksgiving — that is, they are personal and singular. Such feelings well up in man whenever the cycles of nature and of the liturgy provide an occasion. Beginning of spring means every year joy and merriment — in India as much as in other countries.

The special feature of the Psalms is that they also give vent to elemental feelings, such as sorrow, wrath, fear, which on first sight do not appear to be "religious". They are accepted as existential religious attitudes. The Psalms teach us that God is mighty, capable of violent outburst of emotions. His fury can destroy, his threats may create in us fear and trembling. His ways are not our ways, His thoughts not our thoughts. And likewise man may burst out in emotions, such as when he, tortured by doubts, threatened by weakness, stands before God, terribly lonely, saying: "I believe, my God. Take away my disbelief."

Two main groups of Psalms have been distinguished: Cries of *lamentation* and songs of *praise*. Man's initial situation is his suffering, his misery, his feeling of weakness and helplessness; from this arises his lamentation which is, at the same time, his prayer for help. Sorrow and fear, doubt and accusation, mingle. Unlike the animal which suffers mutely, man lends a voice to his suffering. In fact the psalmist unburdens himself like a naive and impulsive child. His song is a release of pent-up emotions and the first step to healing. This childlikeness is



possible only from a trust in God. The psalmist has acknowledged that God is greater than he is, that he rescues despite his wrath, is compassionate despite the punishments he inflicts, and he is confident that God rescues and shows compassion to him at the end. Meditating on the psalms today, the psalmists' trust in God fills us with wonder. Is this not actually the strength of the psalmists amidst their human failings?

Sooner or later God will help, and the psalmist breaks forth in a song of praise and thanksgiving, again sustained by his childlike trust that God's help and protection is despite the ups and downs of life. His final word to man, that "the just own the land". These three steps, lamentation—God's help—song of praise, represent a scheme which is virtually universal. He who prays genuinely as a "whole man", prays thus.

And this has led us to a subject which touches directly the intentions of this small volume : *the universality of the psalms*. It is a historic fact that the psalms are not tied to the Jewish horizon of experience, although they grew up within it. Already the monks and faithful of early Christianity learned the psalms from memory and included them in their prayer-books. And up to this day, the psalms are the stock of our breviaries and monastic hours.

In this book we have gone one step further. We have asked ourselves : If the psalms express the feelings of Jewish and Christian believers, would it not be possible

that they express the religious feelings of other religions too — perhaps of Hindus — in equal measure? Our comparison between the Hindu *kirtan* and the Old Testament provides the answer. We are convinced that in the psalms we have a fund of the entire scale of feelings and moods which come into play at the dialogue between God and man : The feelings of man towards God and those of God towards man, as man experiences them.

Exactly this universality seems to be the reason for the contemporary popularity of the psalms. The modern world with its conflicts and strife has no patience with straight "pious" solutions of our fundamental problems; it is more sympathetic towards an attitude towards God which does not bar doubt, weakness, tears and suffering, which is, together with joy and gratitude, wonder and peace, the whole symphony of our lives.

\* \* \*

We owe an explanation for why we have prepared "*Indian Psalm-Meditations*." At first this simply means that two people, an Indian artist and a German writer, who has made India his home, have come together and meditated on the psalms. Both love the psalms and feel — as Christians — that they respond to their religious needs. Both also love the country in which they live, and the people they share their lives with; they have studied the myths and ways of life of India for many years. This book is nothing but the result of this mingling of the spirituality of the psalms and the Indian spirit and life in the *experience* of an artist and a writer.



This book is no academic comparison between two religions or spiritualities; it does not assert that the one is equal to the other. We make no theological statements, either with regard to Christianity or Hinduism. At no time in the long history of the Old Testament and of Hinduism have these two traditions touched and influenced each other; they grew up side by side, and are independent. We respect this independence. Yet time does not stand still. Traditions are no museum pieces — in fact they must not become museum pieces. Traditions continue to develop, unfolding new possibilities from time-honoured ideas. We contemporary people build new and long bridges from one culture to another; our souls need nourishment, and we take it, in conformity with our modern situation, from both cultures. These cultures remain, as such, independent from each other, but our experience connects them, adding a new piece to tradition.

In the Indian aesthetical theory of *nava-rasa* we found a suitable scheme to distribute the subject matter in a balanced way. *Rasa*, "juice", "taste," signifies a particular emotion — and nine (*nava*) such emotions have been distinguished. Together they represent the entire scale of human emotions which is, as we have mentioned, present in the psalms as well. The *rasas* obtained importance in India in drama, poetry and dance. *Rasa* is the ideal recreation of an emotion within the spectator or reader which he has experienced already at an earlier time and which in its elementary structure remains latent within man. The woodcuts of the artist together with the texts

of the writer wish to activate within the reader the same emotions which they have felt while meditating on the psalms.

We have, however, used the *rasas* freely. *Sringāra*, erotic emotion, has been altered into "Yearning"; for *hāsyā*, the comic emotion, is, so we felt, no room in the psalms; likewise, *vibhatsa*, the emotion of disgust, was abandoned, and its place taken by "Sorrow", an emotion essential to the psalms. The rest of the *rasas* have been reproduced unchanged, namely, *raudra* (Fury), *karuna* (Compassion), *vīra* (Courage, heroism), *bhayānaka* (Fear), *adbhuta* (Wonder), *sānta* (Peace).

Quite purposely we have used *emotions* as the basis for our meditations. To us, they appear to be the meeting-ground for people of different ages and different religions. Universality of religion becomes apparent in feeling. But we also thought that contemporary man is less in need of definitions and proofs of God, and rational discussions about the truths of faith (though we do not dispute their value), than the reactivation and liberation of religious feelings. The people of the psalms and the Hindu devotee can be our teachers.

Each of the eight chapters has one emotion as its theme. Intertwined are meditations on the five elements known in India, namely, Space, Air, Fire, Water and Earth. The element meditation and the themes which follow are loosely connected. We attempt to take the reader back to the "elementary" stage of his religious



existence, and show him how deeply it is interlinked with nature and the simple things.

The woodcut, the hand-written page with a psalm-quotation and a reading from a Hindu Scripture or Hindu saint, and the subsequent meditation are interrelated and to be taken as a unit. In the meditation-texts we have not only drawn from Hindu philosophy, but also from myth, and from the activity of nature in India. At least a few references to the social situation in India were felt to be essential. Psalm-texts have been interspersed; they carry on a dialogue with the meditation-texts and their themes. They are not mere echoes of what we say in the meditations, but they suggest responses meant to evoke reflection.

We have composed this small volume in the hope that all those who habitually read the psalms and are possibly tired of doing so, may conceive them in a fresh light, discover a new relevance in them, particularly to their Indian context. Others, who may not yet have been touched by the magic of the psalms, or felt their depth, could perhaps find here a guide to show them how universal, how deeply human — and how Indian — the psalms are.

*Martin Kämpchen*  
*Jyoti Sahi*

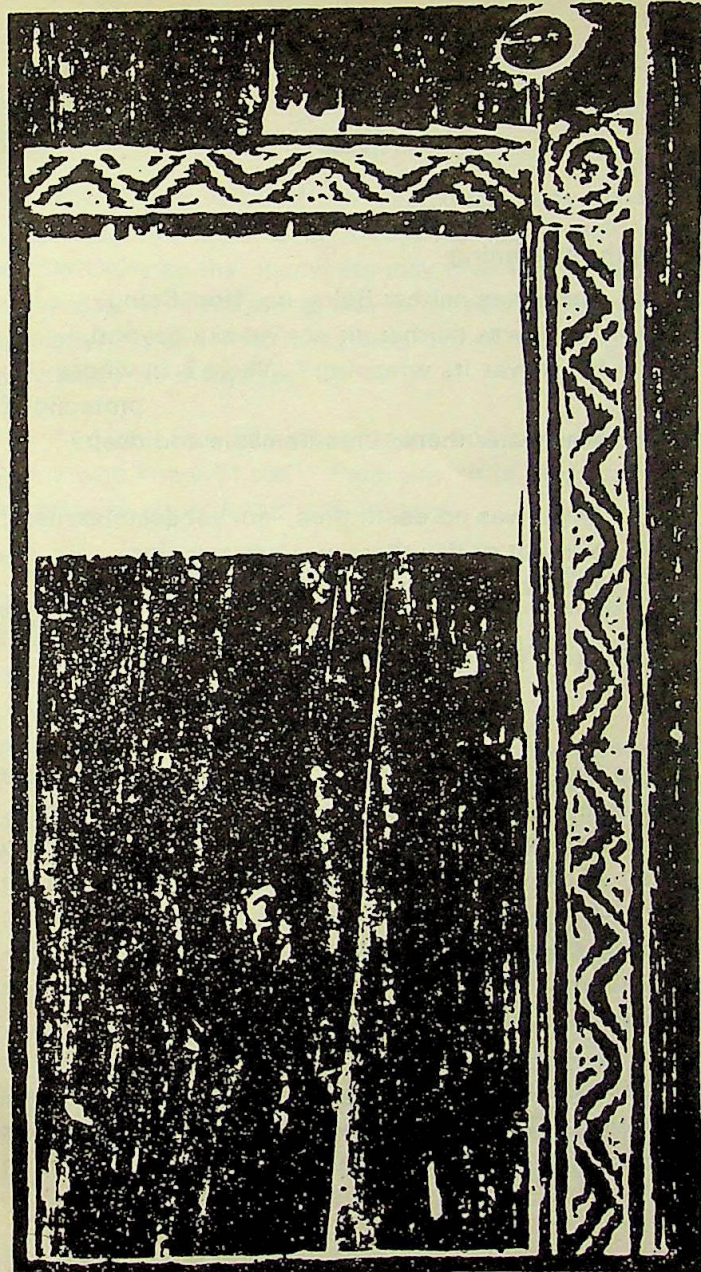
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## SPACE

## In the beginning

There was no death then, nor yet deathlessness;  
of night or day there was not any sign.  
The One breathed without breath, by its own  
impulse.  
Other than that there was nothing else at all.

*Rig-Veda* X, 129, 1-2

The One vibrated, moved. Through movement came about energy, heat — the primal energy of creation. This energy was the fervour of love which desired to create, which desired to unfold itself from the One to the Many. And in this love-desire for creation everything has been created. How has everything come into existence, who has willed it? From the One Mystery creation has been born.

It is said that the consciousness "I am" has come about first. The One realized that "It is". From this knowledge everything else has come — the elements of



space, air, fire, water, earth and all creatures in whom these elements mingle.

The One saw but Itself and knew only of Itself. Driven by the impulse of love It wanted to make many within Unity so that manyess may give rise to ever new manyess. That the world may be filled with the mystery of manyess and that manyess, which is but the One, may enjoy its manyess.

And the One knowledge split and then there were Many who knew "I am". From this, it is said, came the world with all its forms and colours.

From the One, the divine "I am", all else has developed. But what came from It first was Sound. God filled the whole wide emptiness and loneliness with the rhythm of sounds, filled emptiness and loneliness with the vibrations, the vigour, the warmth of His word. And from this invisible, infinitely fine and secret word came Space so that the word may be contained in it and may not be lost in spaceless emptiness. Thus Space came into being.

*The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.  
Day to day pours forth speech,  
and night to night declares knowledge.  
There is no speech, nor are there words;  
their voice is not heard;  
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,  
and their words to the end of the world.*

The rhythms in space were expression of pure joy — God's joy in his creative urge, God's joy in the Song of His creation which once intoned will never end again; for what is one tone without all others, what is a melody which is not the beginning of other melodies?

The rhythms in space are like the dance of God's joy. From this dance will arise form after form in profuse diversity, rushing outward by the power of the whirling dance, rushing upto the limits of space and filling it to overflowing.

God delights in the purity of his creation for it is still completely one, undivided, subtle. The rhythms fill space like water fills the ocean, and blue the sky, fully and finely. There are bounds, it is not limitless. God enjoys the limitation through space, for does not joy need limits so it may become full?

*Bless the Lord, O my soul !  
O Lord my God, thou art very great !  
Thou art clothed with honour and majesty,  
who coverest thyself with light as with a garment,  
who hast stretched out the heavens like a tent,  
who hast laid the beams of thy chambers on the  
waters. . .*

Into this still space the *Inward Wanderer* returns after having left all other creation behind, like a shipman pressing against the current of life to return to the source. At the end of his wanderings he discovers this still space,



the Cave of his Heart, filled by God's still word. After his senses and feelings and the will are quiet, looking within, he experiences the untouched freshness of creation's dawn. It is in this pure emptiness that God's fulness dwells.

What a mystery that within a body of flesh and bones, in the midst of creation fully unfolded, there rests the first act of creation, like a seed in the dark ground. And like space, is not the tiny seed, too, wide and great within?

The *Outward Wanderer* feels in this still space as if he were in the empty desert through which he wanders anxious for the milk and honey of the promised land. Space does not have the manifold limitations and forms which eye and ear can comprehend: its stillness is without weight and colour. There is within him the urge to go on; he is like the Israelites who murmured against God in the desert because they desired to have the plough, or the bow and arrow in their hands in order to praise God.

## (1) KARUNĀ RĀSA

### COMPASSION

Gautama Buddha said that he would gladly carry the burden of all the sorrows of men, if he could give them relief: *Karunā*, Compassion, has become the strongest driving force in Buddhism. The psalmist wavers between extolling God's wonderful compassion, and his entreaty for compassion; he expresses wounded astonishment that God can look on inactively while the enemies of the just get the upper hand. He sings :  
Lord, you are compassionate, o show me  
your compassion !

For the Buddha, the aim of compassion is ultimate deliverance and dissolution in the *nirvāṇa*. Similarly the Indian mendicant monk, or *sannyāsi*, seeks, ideally, spiritual detachment from his worldly surroundings by putting his trust in God, in Him alone. Trust draws down God's compassion.

The psalmist yearns for the "land" which God has promised to the righteous. For God's compassion becomes full only when he has dispensed justice. The godless man has no claim for compassion. Be steadfast in justice is the psalmist's advice for earning God's compassion.



How can the misery, the catastrophies of our time, the meanness of hostile people be reconciled with God's compassion? This is the constant inner conflict of the psalm-poets :

*Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me,  
for in thee my soul takes refuge;  
in the shadow of thy wings I will take refuge,  
till the storms of destruction pass by.*





Save me  
O God, for the  
waters have come up  
~~~~~ to my neck!  
I sink in deep mire  
where there is no  
foothold.

Ps 69, 1-2

No devotee  
of mine is ever  
lost.

Take refuge in Me  
and you reach the  
highest goal.

Bhagavad Gita 18:31-32

WHEN GAUTAMA BUDDHA received Enlightenment under the Bodhi-tree, he remained motionless, lost in his inner experience. Thus he sat many days. The Teaching he had received in the moment of Enlightenment, Buddha said, was too profound and hard for men to grasp as they had not set their heart on wisdom. Useless it was to proclaim the Teaching. Brahmā, the Creator of the World, heard these words and cried out what echoed through the universe: "Then the world will perish!" He appeared and said: "How hard it has been to receive Enlightenment. And now you want to keep it to yourself? Have you not received it that you may free others from the bondage of their lives? Proclaim the Teaching!" And Buddha went and taught.

*Hide not thy face from thy servant;  
for I am in distress, make haste to answer me.  
Draw near to me, redeem me,  
set me free because of my enemies I*



He who has placed his foot into the mire, sinks ever deeper down — the more he struggles the quicker. Yet the lotus-flower rises out of the mire which nourishes its roots; it pierces through the surface into the light. In the mire its petals were folded up tightly forming an arrow pointing upward. Once having reached the light, pure, untarnished, the lotus unfolds its petals like arms raised in praise. Thus the one who trusts in God through his compassion grows into light out of the mire into which he had slipped. For God cannot but be compassionate, like the sun which must forever shine.

*He drew me up from the desolate pit,  
out of the miry bog,  
and set my feet upon a rock,  
making my steps secure.  
He put a new song in my mouth,  
a song of praise to our God.*

Yet, in this connection, a story must be told which happened in the India of today. Outside a village in Rajasthan lived a small community of landless labourers with their families. They worked on the fields of the land-owners, and wandered, after the harvest, to the market-towns where they carried sacks, cooked their rice beside the path, and went to sleep next to the fire. Then the government promised them land; but only to those who agreed to get themselves sterilised (as part of the family-planning scheme). An Indian woman loves her children even when she cannot feed them all, but

some men paid the price and in return received forty *bighās* of land.

For the first time they ploughed not for others, but with the hope to reap the harvest for themselves. They cultivated their fields with love. The rice shoots sprang up towards the sun like green flames. The ears of corn became yellow and ripe. On the day of the harvest they got up before the sun and went to the fields. There men met them armed with sticks and stopped them. They were the sons and neighbours of the former landowner, a rich farmer, who had to surrender a part of his superfluous wealth to the government. A fight ensued, and the poor labourers left streaming with blood. They had to watch how others cut the harvest and carried it away.

*Rescue me from sinking in the mire,  
let me be delivered from my enemies. . .*

The workers appealed to the patwari and the police for help, but in vain. They filed a case in the court. Many hearings, charges, bribes were necessary, but they won the case. Appeal. Again the workers won. Appeal at the Supreme Court of the province. Where from should they take the money for the long journey, and for good lawyers? What to live on in the meantime? The case drags on, longer and longer. . .

*Thou knowest my reproach,  
and my shame and my dishonour;  
my foes are all known to thee.*




*Insults have broken my heart,  
so that I am in despair.  
I looked for pity, but there was none;  
and for comforters, but I found none.*


The lotus is — all too often — still hidden in the mire, closed. *Do not thou, O Lord, withhold thy compassion from me.* Else, the world will perish.





 All creatures  
look to thee, to give  
them their food in  
due season, when thou  
givest to them, they gather  
it up, when thou openest thy  
hand, they are filled with good  
things

Ps 104, 27-28

 Saviour  
of my life,  
grant me the food of grace  
and forgiveness as I  
journey forth.

Rabindranath Tagore

HE WHO HAS LEARNT fully to trust in the compassion of God, has no longer anything to fear from his fellow-men. He may know their weaknesses, and yet he is sure that he will receive at the right time what he needs for his life. Therefore — if the father of the family sees his hair turn grey (so was laid down by Manu, the great law giver of ancient India), he should hand over the affairs of the family to his eldest son and retire into the solitude of the woods for sacred study and meditation; in the last stage of his life he even leaves the hermitage and wanders from temple to temple as a *sannyāsi*. With the begging-bowl in his hand, he stands in front of the doors of householders drawing their attention with a word of prayer. If nobody responds, he goes on. If the door opens, and the mistress of the house gives him a handful of cooked rice, or some vegetable or fruits, the mendicant sings a prayer of thanksgiving, and proceeds. Once a day



he thus fills his bowl and eats. He accepts no money, never says: Give me this, give me that. Silently he holds out his empty bowl, trusting in the compassion of the Lord.

*He rained down upon them manna to eat,  
and gave them the grain of heaven.  
Man ate of the bread of the angels;  
he sent them food in abundance.*

And at night the *sannyāsi* sleeps under the sky protected only by the hollowed hand of God above him. He lights a fire next to him which he maintains throughout the night, for the spirit wakes, even though the body rests.

*He spread a cloud for a covering,  
and fire to give light by night.*

The *sannyāsi* has, ideally, as a father and husband, given to society what is its due. Now he goes into the desert of solitude with God. He is a grain of sand, glowing hot in the midday-sun, which God every day again picks up to blow his cooling breath on. He who has snapped the inner bonds with the world of men, who has no roof for protection and no arms to console him,

fully experiences the compassion of God. From the beginning it has blown around him, yet now the sails of the spirit have been put up and the wind carries them on.

It is hoped that in this wandering homelessness, the heart of the *sannyāsi* will widen itself until it encompasses all men, all creatures. He enjoys the living moment, for tomorrow hunger may drench his spirit. He picks up the children playing at the roadside and takes them into his arms, feeling their lives; he looks deeply into the red of the flowers, until it sinks into his eyes, for tomorrow there may be thirst and exhaustion, hardship and fear.

For God's compassion can be hard. Can we always understand it? A cyclone turns its course and devastates a coastal area lying to the north of where we live. Many villages are washed away — while we are spared, and thank God. There are the dead, the orphans, the widows, the poor farmers whose huts have been flattened out and whose fields are poisoned by saline water — their hearts cry to God in despair.

*Some wandered in desert wastes,  
finding no way to a city to dwell in;  
hungry and thirsty,  
their soul fainted within them.  
Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,  
and he delivered them from their distress.*



God always rescues. Everyone who falls, thrown down by the storms of the sky or by the vicissitudes of life, God catches into his arms, for he is everywhere. Nobody can fall bottomlessly, for God is the Ground. True, often the Ground is deep, terribly deep, and we fall and fall for a long time through darkness, until we feel Him.

*Be mindful of thy mercy, O Lord,  
and of thy steadfast love,  
for they have been from of old.*

Ramakrishna used to call out, "Why do you want to understand God's deeds? It is all His play. We are puppets in his hands. Are games 'reasonable'? It gives him mighty pleasure to play with us. Is it not enough to know this much?" He has created us in the overflow of his joy. We play along, laugh along, even if we do not understand.

Does it not suffice to experience God's compassion as a mystery? God is not as earnestly compassionate as might suit us. Nature is compassionate in like manner; in ever renewed cycles nature moves from growth to maturity and decay, and is still ever perfected in herself. The harvest is scorched in the burning sun, or it rots in the mire of great floods — and yet nature goes on and on, offering full round fruits in the next harvest, never

tired, never broken and dead. Droughts and floods are the low and high tones in the melody of nature. Men suffer, yet the song as a whole is nothing but the song of a mother for her child.



### (3) VĪRA RASA

#### COURAGE

In these meditations we do not so much consider heroic courage, not the single courageous act for which daily life gives us rarely an opportunity, but the courage to submit to God's protection, and the courage to carry on with our daily lives indefatigably. The well-known simile from the Mundaka-Upanishad of the arrow of our (soul) which must be pointed at God as its target, certainly suits the mentality of the psalmists who consider life as a battle and describe their struggle for God and for a happy, peaceful life in the community of their people with images derived from battle and war.





The Lord  
is my rock, and my fortress,  
and my deliverer,  
The Lord is my rock, in whom  
I take refuge,  
my shield, and the horn of  
my salvation, my stronghold.

Ps. 18, 2.

Hurry quickly  
and place your foot  
on my head  
blessing me  
you only true God  
manikkavasagar

HE WHO SINKS to the depth of his fears, his sorrows and his doubts, and while sinking accepts and bears these with courage, he touches at their rock bottom something which feels terribly bare and rigidly strange, as if it were hard rock. On it there is no leisurely rest, there is no sense of comfort. He who touches this rock comes into contact with his very existence, as this rock is unshakeable and eternal. This rock seems strange to him, almost hostile. And yet he feels within him the almost terrifying assurance that he is protected by the Eternal within him: that he sinks in it, endlessly without ever emerging out of it. Man finds his shelter in Space which engulfs him widely, and yet protectingly.

The price of this is the courage to surrender. The Indian gesture of surrender is the touching of the feet. Children touch the feet of their parents, disciples the feet of their gurus, and devotees fall prostrate at the feet



of the image of their God, pressing their forehead against it which they embrace with their arms. The feet are the lowest part of the body, the one which constantly comes in touch with the dust and dirt of the earth, and which is therefore also the dirtiest part of the body. "I am only a speck of dust on your holy feet", says the devotee. He identifies himself with the earth, the lowly, gross, dark earth as it spreads under everybody's feet. Everyone walks across it giving it scarcely a glance: He praises the warmth of the sun, the luminosity of the air, the cool flow of the water, but the earth is but the dust which, journey completed, one washes off one's feet. The devotee, however, does not raise his eyes. He says, "My Lord, I don't dare to look at thy face. It is enough for me to know thy feet and find protection under them." Thus he discovers, being one with the earth, the freedom of the eternal space within.

*My flesh and my heart may fail,  
but God is the rock of my heart  
and my portion for ever.*

God places his foot on the head of his devotee, who lies before him on the earth. God touches him firmly and heavily, and this touch is His grace, His protection. For God's touches are always great, even those of conquest and victory.

*The Lord is your keeper;  
the Lord is your shade on your right hand.  
The sun shall not smite you by day,  
nor the moon by night.*

• • •





The morning sun illumines the prematurely old, worn  
out faces of the couple.





But thou,  
O Lord, art a  
Shield about me,  
my glory.  
and the lifter  
of my head!

Ps. 3, 3

A mighty weapon  
the Upanishad! Take  
it as a bow. Affix an  
arrow, sharpened by  
devotion, bend the bow  
the mind concentrated  
on God.

Mundaka Upanishad II, 2, 3,

"BEND THE BOW, the mind concentrated on God", says the Upanishad: "And hit the target—the Imperishable God!" And the explanation of this image follows:

OM is the bow, the *ātman* is the arrow;  
*brahman*, it is said, is the target which is hit  
by concentration: Thus you are  
united with *brahman*, like an arrow with the target.

*Mundaka Upanishad II, 2, 4*

The bow is the revealed Holy Scripture, it is the instrument with whose help we unite ourselves with God (*brahman*), if only we insert the arrow—our soul (*ātman*)—and learn to aim well.

The essence and content of Holy Scripture are contained in this one syllable—OM. It is not only the sound symbol of the Absolute, but it is God himself taken as divine sound. OM is God as He has revealed himself to



the world and to men in the most subtle and pure mode. For what is more subtle and purer than the vibrations of sound? It needs nothing—neither air nor fire, nor water, nor earth—only space that it may be filled with the never-ending, ever-renewed rhythms of sound. The spoken and the written word, even the holy word of revelation is subject to the limitations of the voice, of word-meaning, and of the comprehension of the human mind; by them the width and purity of the divine OM is made narrow and gross.

*Ātman*, the soul of man, is inserted in the bow, bending it to breaking-point, bending what is the most subtle revelation of God in the world, bending the frame of the whole created world which is permeated, perhaps secretly but effectively, by this most subtle substance; and it, the *ātman*, fills itself with the whole strength of the world—to gather the courage to fly off: "And hit the target—the Imperishable God!" Let off, the arrow flies freely and lonely trusting alone the strength of the first thrust.

*Yea, thou dost light my lamp;  
the Lord my God lightens my darkness.  
Yea, by thee I can crush a troop;  
and by my God I can leap over a wall.*

Letting off of the arrow after the soul has understood which direction to take, needs courage. The target is far off; the flight of the arrow is lonely, lonely through wide spaces. Yet, once shot off, it must follow its direction unerringly, as long as its thrust endures.

There is the fisherman who every morning at dawn pushes his boat into the ocean, and kneeling on its planks, a short oar in his hands, struggles through the surf, behind which he stands up, and throws his net into the open, still water. Look, how he stands there, the naked dark figure on the gently rocking wood, set against the rays of the rising sun; how he stands there, morning after morning, throwing his net, then waiting, with quiet patience, and draws in the net, and throws it back, letting it sink into deep water...

There is the washerman who, bent under a heavy bundle, makes his way to the pond in the early light of the morning, who then, standing in knee-deep water, pounds the clothes, piece after piece, against the big flat stone in front of him, pounding with wide movements of his arms, pounding and pounding for hours and hours every morning, until the sun has climbed into the top of the palm-trees, and then the washerman spreads the clean clothes underneath her on the sand...

*For I have kept the ways of the Lord,  
and have not wickedly departed from my God.  
For all his ordinances were before me  
and his statutes I did not put away from me.*

Letting off is what needs courage, after the soul has understood which direction to take. And courage must sustain the lonely flight through life, in obedience to the once chosen direction.



*Thou didst give a wide place for  
my steps under me,  
and my feet did not slip.*

\* \* \*

Bow and arrow are weapons for attack, they belong into the hands of a fighter. We praise the aggressive courage which strives to stand face to face with God in joyous moments as well as in sad ones—always—and keeps clear, with his strength of heart, the line of fire to God. We also praise the courage of the fisherman, and the washerman, of the simple people, who leave their huts day after day filling the day with work, in order to sit down with their family for a meal of rice in the evening and be able to go to sleep satisfied. They, too, stand face to face with God day after day, keeping the arrow of their soul inserted in the bow of God's word and God's world.

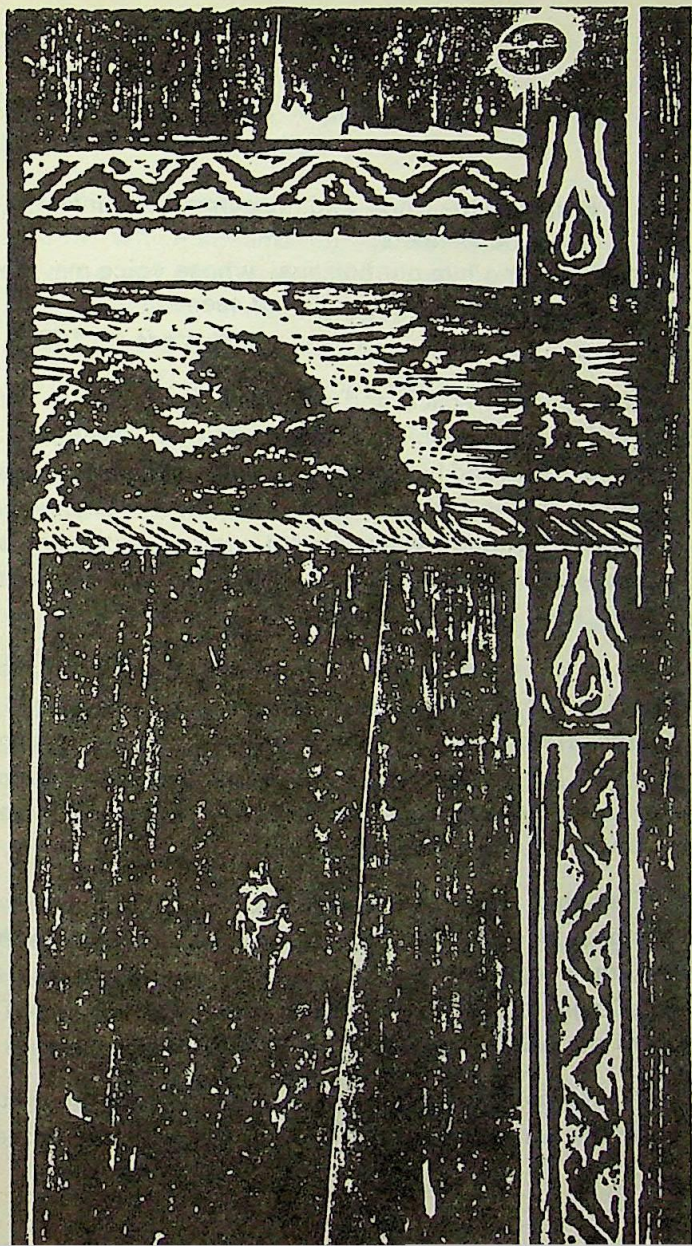
He who stands before God thus—upright, unprotected, for everyone to see, remaining the master of his troubling thoughts, doubts, and dangers, his steady eyes and steady hands directed towards the target—will he not also receive God's protection at the time of attack?

*Thou hast given me the shield of thy salvation,  
and thy right hand supported me,  
and thy help made me great.*

The farmer gives away the seeds to the earth while he walks behind the plough, the grains which could satisfy

his own hunger—trusting in the work of nature, which is God's work, that he will reap tenfold and a hundred-fold... The heat of noon is cool under a broad banyan tree... The thirst after the labours of the day is quenched with water from the well... In nature each labour has its own reward, and each need its own satisfaction. And so it is with God. Courage draws down God's protection.





## AIR

(Vāyu)

Breath of the Gods, and life germ of the universe,  
freely he wanders.

We bring him our homage, whose voice may be  
heard but whose form is not seen.

*Rig-Veda X, 168, 4.*

God touched space and unfolded the air in it. It dispersed swiftly, rushing forward into all directions. Ever since then wind has moved from everywhere and has fled, once it has arrived, again into every direction. Nobody clearly knows where from it comes, for the limits of space are endlessly far, and nobody knows where it goes, for soon its traces are lost.

Thus movement entered into the stillness of space where only the rhythms of God's secret word had pulsated. Into the eternity of space has entered the unceasing motion of Time. And space receives movement within itself and yet remains unmoved and wide. Eternity loves the movement of Time in its midst.

The wind is fleeting, carefree and gay, that is why it has been said that God's spirit dwells in it. In the soft wind, reaching down invisibly from the wide spaces, is God's loving touch which fondles man. He blows coolness to the feverish man and fills his heart with gladness.

Yet it was He Himself who has brought the fever to man in the winds ! God threatens with the storm; in the



storm He can be a terrible destroyer. His word which vibrated inaudibly in space, can now be heard in the murmuring sounds of leaves moved by the wind and in the terrible howling of the gale.

The ever-moving air is like the exhaling and inhaling of God, which streams through the whole of space, like day time and night time, low tide and high tide, sunshine and moonshine; also, like happiness and fear, joy and rage. Where is God's mouth? Is it not the expanse of the sky itself, from horizon to horizon?

Look, how the bird, the wild swan, gliding on invisible brilliant air, stretches its still wings: free and glorious it is in the exhaling of the endless Lord! Look, the wild swan, the bird of freedom, how it lies effortlessly and lightly on the fields of the sky. In this we see the Lord's joy in His creation becoming pure, visible movement.

Look and feel how the heavy cloud in the zenith overshadows our life; how God, filled with surging emotions appears as the cloud — visible as the protecting or threatening cloud, yet hidden as Lord — mightily visible and near, and yet a mystery!

It says, God rides on the cloud and leads his people to the promised land, leads them to the unfolding of his creation and the fulness of human life.

*Thou makest the clouds thy chariot,  
and ridest on the wings of the wind,  
thou makest the winds thy messengers.*

The *Inward Wanderer* sings his song : I wish to be like the wild swan who builds his nest in the air and is at home in the wide spaces, with wings stretched out, gliding quietly back to the source. I want to spread myself and give myself away to the wide fields of the air — there is nothing I want for myself. In the heat of the summer—air this solid flesh shall melt, in the crisp air of the Himalaya I shall be crispness itself. Nothing I wish to keep for myself, I only wish to be. I live from God's breath; I breathe in and out God's breath, and thus live. His breath lives in my lungs, and wells up flowing into the mouth of my flute which is at my lips. The song of Thy creation, my Lord, is intoned in the melodies of my flute.

The *Outward Wanderer* looks rarely upwards. His gaze seeks its way amidst limits and forms, and the way is still long. His heart is not set on jubilation yet. He yearns for action : with a heavy heart he looks for action; and this is possible only in the variety of the created world. He seeks the battle of life, the joy in life's success, even the bitterness of its disappointments. In action he wishes to experience his being, accepting with an equal willingness the heights of joy and the depths of despair. The Outward Wanderer follows the cloud through the desert, no matter whether it protects or threatens, in order to build one day his house in the promised land, to plough the ground and enjoy in deserved tiredness the evening after his day's work.



The meditations on this theme have the time of the monsoon as their context—the time of thundering showers of rain, of floods and storms. This seems to be the fitting environment for Rudra, a Vedic God who (in the late stage of his cultic worship) appeared as the God of revenge and destruction, who, letting loose gales and thunder, swept across the countryside, riding on a wild boar. The storms bring with them fever, destroying both cattle and men.

Mother Kālī, the principal deity for the Bengalis, is equally fearsome. As is often the case with Mother Goddesses, she symbolises matter, nature, and the dark and mysterious aspects of the world. Matter, following its own inward laws, shapes the destiny of men. Yet, Siva, the divine husband of Kālī, tames her through his fearless submission. We can — and this is Siva's message to us — bring under control the dark and mysterious aspects of nature only by mastering our fear.

A similar feeling moves the psalmist when he praises God's glory which is expressed in His thunder, in His mighty deeds in nature. God is fearsome! Yet he is great in his fearsomeness. This terrible aspect of God also, not only God's kindness and compassion, lead us to prayer.

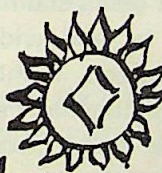






makest the clouds  
thy chariot, and  
ridest on the wings  
of the wind

Ps. 104.3



Father  
of storms, may  
your favour flash  
upon us!

Do not deprive us  
of the sight of the  
sun

Rig Veda II.33.1

PUNCTUALLY, the monsoon began this year delivering nature from scorching heat. Among the undergrowth of dried-up plants the first green shoots rise straight up. The countryside spreads far and wide, open upto the horizon, and beyond the horizon. Hamlets, in the shadow of trees, and hillocks are rhythmically scattered, in grand monotony, upon the wide land. Some boys sit among the roots of a tree and languidly play a game of marbles, while their goats busily graze off the green shoots and, grazing and searching, move off farther and farther. Early afternoon is the time of blank drowsiness. The marbles roll from the boys' hands, and they stretch out their small, half-naked bodies among the roots to rest.

Nobody noticed, when a small wind arose. It blew but soothingly above the slumbering faces. The boys awoke only when the shadow of the clouds fell on them. Confused, not knowing what was happening, they jumped up. A change had taken place. The tree stood black



beside them, the fields around looked pale. The goats I thought the boys, the goats, where are our animals? They ran, not knowing where to, without looking around, without rest, thus they ran shouting after their animals.

*For the Lord, the Most High, is terrible,  
a great king over all the earth.*

The cloud hovered in the zenith—no, it spread across the sky, covering it wholly. It did not drift this way or that, but pulled and pushed inwards, loading blackness upon blackness, hanging dark weights one below the other, until they pressed upon the landscape.

*Day and night thy hand was heavy upon me;  
my strength was dried up as by the heat of  
summer.*

The children screamed with fear. Still running, they screamed after their herd which was dispersed—but the wind, the storm which had set in, scattered their every word.

*My heart is in anguish within me,  
the terrors of death have fallen upon me.  
Fear and trembling come upon me,  
and horror overwhelms me.*

The wind will bring fever — blow fever on us and burn us up, man and beast ! Lord, you heal us ! — prays one boy. God, praise be to you, praise be to you — thinks another — but save us from your storms ! Pour not your fury down on us today. May our praise appease your wrath ! And a third one : God, you are great and fearsome. What have we done ? You kill. So often you have killed, and nobody knew why. But today have mercy. Lord, for we sing your praise !

*My flesh trembles for fear of thee,  
and I am afraid of thy judgments.*

Gasping, with no breath left, one boy stops and throws himself on the ground. He sees neither the animals nor his brothers. Everything is scattered, while the heavy cloud hangs seething above him. No word reaches beyond him who utters it. Scattered everything, you great God, scattered everything ! Will you gather up again ?

*Serve the Lord with fear,  
with trembling kiss his feet. . .*

And further —

*For great is the Lord, and greatly  
to be praised;  
he is to be feared above all gods.*



*Honour and majesty are before him;  
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.  
Tremble before him, all the earth!  
Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns!"*





The voice  
of the Lord breaks the  
cedars, the Lord breaks  
the cedars of Lebanon.  
He makes Lebanon to skip  
like a calf, and Sirion  
like a young wild ox.

Ps. 29. 5-6

BECAUSE you love  
the burning grounds,  
I have made one  
of my heart, that you  
may dance therein  
your eternal dance  
Ramprasad

AT FIRST THE clouds arise royally from the horizon, gather into mountains of clouds, driven together again and again by the winds. The evening sun lights a majestic fire which plays on a thousand clouds. It is the time of the monsoon – the time for dramatic spectacles in the sky.

At night people wake up in their huts. Sitting up they listen intently to the rain which the wind brushes against the straw-thatched roofs. First it is like murmuring voices in the air, then there are mighty thunder bolts from the sky. The storm follows with a roar. Wherever they look, men see only darkness. The children bury their faces in their small hands. As if they could shield their little lives and escape all danger. They are frightened and fill the night with their silence.

*The voice of the Lord is upon the waters;  
the God of glory thunders,  
the Lord, upon many waters.*



The child had in the evening heard the lullaby sung by his mother; now its words were drumming in frightful distortions against the roof. The old farmer had celebrated his pūjā before the holy images; and now the furious noise drives off the sweetness of his songs from his heart. Will the floods come again, as they had come last year? Will gale and rain flatten the rice shoots and leave them rotting in the fields? Will there be no harvest? No rice to cook, to serve on plates, to be rolled with fingers and carried to mouths as food to eat?

The people wait—wait for the next hour, the next day, impatient to know what lies in store for them. They tremble at the thought of the future and yet they cling to the present moment, in the remote hope that their worst fears might not come true. Time, meanwhile, marches on, unfeeling, irresistibly.

*The voice of the Lord is powerful,  
the voice of the Lord is full of majesty.*

The voice of an old woman spoke in the dark: "It is Mother Kālī who in thunder and destruction comes down upon us. Do you know Mother Kālī, my child? Look around, then you will see her: Her black, black face, her black disshevelled hair. Human skulls she wears around her neck. They bang against each other while Mother dances, and dances, never getting tired. In one hand—do you see?—she holds a severed head by its hair. It swings back and forth. And in the other she wields a

blood-dripping sword. How she laughs ! Listen, how terribly she laughs while she dances and dances."

The child's voice is heard from the dark: "Why, grandmother, why is the goddess so fearful? She is our Mother, isn't she?"

The grandmother replies: "The Great Goddess Durgā, the Mother of the world, once, in a bygone age, battled against an army of demons. They wanted to take possession of the world. When Durgā, the benign Mother, saw the army which was ready for battle, she became aglow with fury, Her face darkened. And from her brow, hot with fury, sprang off Kālī like a spark of her wrath. And the demons, my child, were terror stricken when they saw Kālī: They were either petrified from fear, or turned in flight—I am not sure which. Kālī, however, leapt here and there like a spreading fire, roaring like thunder, and killed them all."

*The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames  
of fire.*

*The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness,  
the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.*

"But Kālī cannot stop. In bounding leaps she dances, throwing high her arms, hacking off what comes in her way. She tramples like drum-beats. The earth shakes. The earth may break open. Goddess Kālī cannot stop."



*The voice of the Lord makes oaks to whirl,  
and strips the forests bare,  
and in his temple all cry "Glory".*

The rain of the night drums upon the roofs, the storm of the night hurls itself against the mud-walls. Water enters already the huts: little children begin to cry unconsolably. They understand that their mother can no longer envelop them with love and security. Kālī cannot stop. What will the end be? When will the end come? And what will happen thereafter? Imagination fails to conceive; there are empty images to all questions. The end is the Other. And it already has its hold upon us.

*But thou, terrible art thou!  
Who can stand before thee  
when once thy anger is roused?  
From the heavens thou didst utter judgement;  
The earth feared and was still. . . .*

The little voice in the dark is heard asking: "But why, grandmother, does the terrible Kālī come to us?" And grandmother laughs. "Yes, why?" persisted the child.

"Is she not our mother, my child? Is it not natural that she should come to visit her children? She presses us against her breasts, and suffocates us in her arms. Destruction of bodies, of homes, of harvests, she only laughs about it. She laughs about death. She creates

a new world, another order. She creates and creates in her dance of destruction, and never stops.

"Why do you fear, my child? Why do you yearn to return into a sultry oppressive womb, dark and narrow, even if it seems to offer protection? You are born to be free, to move and to see. So do not look away. Gaze firmly at the Terrible. Be brave in your fear!

Worship Kālī, the Terrible! Pay homage to the laughing Kālī? What about the hopes and resistance of our soul that shrinks from what is frightening? And the movements of our feelings which contract before what instils fear? And the deeds of our hands which ever attempt to hinder fear from entering into us?

"Be brave, my child, in your fear. Gaze firmly at Mother Kālī's terrible face. For when Kālī danced in wild joy and would not give up, Siva, her husband, came to stop her. She did not hear she saw him not. So he threw himself under her feet, under the fury of her feet in trust, in terrible and absolute trust. She sees him now lying there, perfectly still. She opens her mouth in sudden surprise — and yields!"

*In God, whose word I praise,  
in God I trust without a fear.*



(5) RAUDRA RASA

FURY

God's fury can express itself in two ways. He looks at the godless, the sinners, with hard, punishing eyes so that they recoil :

*Take thy furious eyes away from me,  
let me draw breath.*

The drum in God's hand (see the first picture) which beats the rhythm vigorously, points to the threatening presence of God from which no man can withdraw himself.

Or God turns away, covers his face (as depicted in the second meditation) and leaves men to their own fate so that the righteous begin to mourn :

*My heart says to thee,  
"Thy face, Lord, do I seek."  
Hide not thy face from me.*

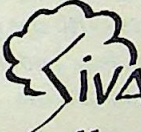
Yet, at the end we allude to a possible explanation. Does God, in his fury, want to destroy us ? Perhaps he only chastens us, as a father chastens his child, who has erred.





All our  
days pass away  
under thy wrath,  
our years come  
to an end like  
a sigh.

Ps 90, 9

 SIVA, thy  
thunderbolt rules over  
meadows, hills and sky!  
O God, Slayer of Time!  
Thou the Great Void,  
King of righteousness!  
Thou blessed one,  
redeem me.  
Ramakrishna

*My days are like an evening shadow;  
I wither away like grass,  
I eat ashes like bread,  
and mingle tears with my drink,  
because of your fury and anger;  
for thou hast taken me up and thrown me  
away.*

From the sky burns a merciless midday-sun. The sky is clear, white and aglow like a crystal. From one end of the horizon to the other, the sky pours itself to the ground. There are no shadows, no hiding-places. On the verandah of his hut, sparingly covered by the overhanging straw of the roof, the old man is lying on a mat. He has his eyes closed against the light of the sky, his face is covered over with dripping sweat which no one wipes off. The heavens throw their flames at the gradually dying body, lying motionless.



*For thy arrows have sunk into me,  
and thy hand has come down on me.*

*There is no soundness in my flesh because  
of thy fury!  
there is no health in my bones because of my sin.*

No, I do not die yet—thinks the dying man. The harsh tapping in his temples, resounds painfully through his body, like the loud beat of a drum

*I am utterly spent and crushed;  
I groan because of the tumult of my heart.*

It appears as if the air comes down on him in crushing waves. The fury of God collects itself from all parts of the bare sky and rushes at him like drum-beats. The life-energy of the universe whirls down in rhythmic cadences and shakes this body. He too is part of that Energy — but empty now, burnt out, only its victim.

*For my iniquities have gone over my head;  
they weigh like a burden too heavy for me.*

His stored up sense of guilt takes on forms which emanate from his body like shadow figures. There is the skeleton form of greed which bends over him and touches his body searchingly; there the fury of anger writhes out of his body, and turning against him, pounds him with its fists. And craftiness in the form of a

snake winds itself slimily across his body. They are torturing his body, as it lies there helplessly. He feels their vice-like grip, he smells their ugly breath. There was a time when he used to transform himself from moment to moment into these beasts to hoard life like a heap of gold, and spend it grudgingly like a miser. His life is utterly spent now, yet these beasts have remained and have turned against him. He sees them from outside now, how ugly they are. Unarmed, he feels the power of sin which he can neither fight off, nor gloat in.

*My wounds grow foul and fester  
because of my sins.*

No, I do not die yet—thinks the dying man. He would have liked to escape the wrath of God, but escape to what place? There are no shadows and no hiding-places. Wherever he runs there would be the sky above him, its angry thunder reverberating like the loud beats of the drum. There the *flames of Thy wrath*, his soul bemoans, *would be flung against me.*


The beat of His drum is the rhythm in which the world unfolds itself in its manifold splendour, in which hour after hour this multiplicity grows wider and more splendid. Yet, to the sinner this beat sounds threatening, and he recoils. For the beating of the drum also draws the universe with the same rash rhythm back from Time into Eternity. The sinner fears eternity, the Great Time.




The old man lies on the verandah of his hut, sparsely protected by the straw-roof, his eyes closed against the sight of the sky, his face covered over with dripping sweat which nobody wipes off. The heavens fling their flames against the gradually dying body, lying motionless. I won't die yet, thinks the man. The warm heart-beat of the universe. God's drum-beats, are to him hard and harsh — they are like the drumming of wrath against his life. They are drumming his life back into the Uncreated, into the Great Time.





 Make haste  
to answer me, O Lord,  
My spirit fails!  
Hide not thy face  
from me.

PS 143, 7

 Hidden  
in all things  
the Ātman shines not  
forth. But he is  
perceived by subtle  
seers by means of  
their fine subtle  
intelligence.

Katha Upanishad III, 12

UNDER THE CLOUD-COVERED sky the heavy sultry atmosphere presses down on man. No sun, only leaden light from somewhere. Unwittingly men bow their heads and look to the ground. There is no crimson dawn and no noon—there is only night and day, night and day. And it has been like this for how long already !

The wanderer down there, on his way, goes on from village to village. He who wanders has not yet reached. He who wanders has not yet found his destination. Dazed, he sets foot before foot, in the clammy air. It has become late. He has knocked at the doors of the huts but none has opened. He has stopped before the people sitting outside before their dwellings and they have not looked up at him, they have not asked him any questions, nor expected him to ask any. So he has wandered on and on without food, without the offer of a friendly word, or of a place beside another human being. For what can he do who has no home, no home even in the form of a kindly



word, but to continue wandering together with time,  
which too goes on and on?

*How long, O Lord? Wilt thou hide  
thyself for ever?  
How long will thy wrath burn like fire?*

This is the silent 'turning-away' wrath of God—God who denies himself. God who lets you wait, God—the dark God. His flames seize us, burn us, but do not burn us to ashes. And His fire is the emptiness of men and the mute facelessness of the world.

Under His wrath withers the green of the meadows and shrinks the ripe fruit. In the dead waters swarms of flies breed and buzz in the humid darkness, never tired of their fury to sting. Foul discharges heap up behind the huts. Nobody looks after the sick, they lie on the ground in their dark corner, dirty and suffering, and have no energy left in them to complain. The dead have no grave: their names are lost.

*O God, do not keep silence;  
do not hold thy peace or be still, O God!*

This is what happens when the Lord covers his face. It is said that *Parvatī*, Siva's wife, at one time covered the eyes of her husband in jest. And when Siva's eyes were covered, the universe plunged into darkness. Brother turned against brother, even the just man was

tempted to do evil. For nobody could see it, not even God.

*How long, O Long? Wilt thou forget me  
for ever?  
How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?*

God's eye is the light of the universe. The godless triumph when God clasps his hands before his face in wrath. The godless keep their eyes wide open looking out into the night intently. *Their hearts overflow with evil.* They recognize a thousand shades of darkness. *They scoff and speak with malice.* Darkness knows no above and no below, neither heaven nor earth. Only a thousand shadows which appear, distort themselves and vanish — never to be caught.

The just man no longer knows: Am I blind or can I see? He searches and gropes. He can no longer find any direction.

*All in vain have I kept my heart clean  
and washed my hands in innocence.*

The just man ponders, his spirit is embittered and his heart wounded. He raises his hands into the darkness and knows not whether they reach out towards God — whether God, or anyone, can see them.



The wanderer down below on his way goes on and on. He chooses new paths and knocks at the doors. In the restlessness of his spirit he searches for men: for faces, voices, questions. The wanderer needs other men to roll God's wrath off from him. But before he reaches them, God's wrath has already arrived and has engulfed them into His shadow. It flies ahead of the wanderer silently like a night-bird.

*My heart says to thee,*

*"Thy face, Lord, do I seek".*

*Hide not thy face from me.*

*Turn not thy servant away in anger.*

Man raises his hands in burning anxiety. Be not silent, Lord I he cries. But the Lord remains in silence still. Has God himself not sent darkness to veil the brilliance of His face? Cry and call I says He. Suffer, and grow through your suffering. Become mature eating the bread of tears.

First learn that you need my forgiveness and grace, says the Lord. Seek on and on, wanderer, continue on your way, seek, seek . . . Then only shall I enkindle this darkness and burn it to ashes with the fire of grace. Then the mighty Third Eye on Siva's forehead will break open to draw the world from darkness into light. It is the Eye

of Wisdom which will be so bright that whoever draws too near will be set aflame.

*He will not always chide,  
nor will he keep his anger for ever.  
May he make his face to shine upon us,  
that thy way may be known upon earth.*







## FIRE

(Tejas)

You, dispeller of darkness,  
we approach with daily prayers,  
and offer you our sacrifice.     *Rig-Veda I, 1, 7.*

God's eye opened and enkindled the Fire. From all directions of the air sparks flowed and united themselves to a flame. And the flame broadcast its light through the whole of the airy space. The flame glowed from the ends of space, gliding on the waves of the air, down to man and nature, and there was the sun. And in gratitude man prepared sacrificial fires which flame upward into space. Thus the heavenly and the human fire meet, giving and regiving, receiving and offering itself back in the vast space.

*He has set a tent for the sun,  
which comes forth like a bridegroom  
                                         leaving his chamber,  
and like a hero runs its course in joy.  
Its rising is from the end of the heavens,  
and its circuit to the end of them;  
and there is nothing hid from its heat.*

Man seeks, and yet flees the fire. He seeks to be near for its rays of light and warmth, but he does not approach too close from fear that it might burn and destroy.

Whatever unites itself with fire becomes fire, and dies with it. For fire needs food for its life. It is not free; it surges upwards from the earth to the sky, but it is tied



to the earth for its sustenance; it needs the air to exist. And yet fire is freer than anything visible, freer and more lordly than anything that man can subjugate and use for his good. Man governs the freedom of fire by using it for worship and sacrifice, for the burning of incense and the waving of lamps before the images of God for *ārati*; and for consigning to the flames the dead body of his brother or sister so that it may be transformed into the finer elements of air and space.

With fire there came form and colour; man learnt to see and to appreciate the visible. Forms received names and man recognized things—the differences, the opposites and the polarities and interdependences of all forms.

Fire gives itself as light into the flowing air, while it secures sustenance from the earth. Thus it takes and gives at the same time. It exists within this tension.

Fire is at once both form and movement. Its flames dance in a thousand changing forms, enthused, inebriated by the joy to create. 'God's dance of creation reaches its deepest intensity in the leaping fire. This creative force is so self-forgetful in its intensity that it may turn into destruction any moment: Fire burns at the meeting-point of creation and destruction.

Fire is form; it is visible, but it is not static and firm; it is a flowing form. It is a pure, great movement going against gravity, freely fashioned from itself. Though in itself penetrable, it penetrates all things and tolerates no obstruction. Fire is a mystery as deep as its burning core which nobody can touch.

With fire God has set a sign of His mystery: in fire the paradox of the unification of spirit and matter becomes luminously visible. It is the beginning of all material forms, yet it is the symbol of the spirit. Its tongues devour matter, yet see how spiritual and beautiful is the light that has its source in it!

The people in the desert experienced the duality of fire. God punished them with fire when they worshipped false Gods:

*Fire broke out in their company;  
the flame burnt up the wicked.*

And another time God illumined the desert for His people as a sign that He will show them the path in the pathless desert:

*In the daytime he led them with a cloud,  
and all the night with a fiery light.*

The *Inward Wanderer* blazes upwards like a flame in his love for the eternal Lord. All that is solid has become fluid to him, all that is heavy has dissolved into lucid lightness. He approaches the dancing flame of the spirit whose light lures him, but whose heat is threatening.

The *Outward Wanderer* fears the destructive nature of fire, the *glow of God's anger*, the *voice of the Lord* which *flashes forth flames of fire*, and yet he walks behind the fire in order to see the path which leads into the promised land. He seeks the service of the light of fire, yet he is scared of its glowing core. Fire seems to him a great paradox, its nature an unfathomable mystery, but he continues his search.




## WONDER

Wonder about God's glory is the subject of the first meditation. The psalmists could marvel like children, and the *bhakta* is gifted with a similar spontaneity. This sense of wonder is sparked off watching the glories of nature, specially the rising of the sun, and its brilliance during the day, which in Hinduism is a symbol of God's glory. Inspired, the devotee sings his praise of the creator and his creation.

In the second meditation, man begins to understand God's glorious deeds. Man's sense of wonder is replaced by his recognition of God's steadfast love for man, and he gives a fitting answer: his vow to love God in return as deeply as he can. Again the sun is the symbol, this time of God's steadfast love, and the sacrificial fire is man's symbolic answer.



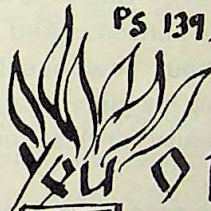




praise  
thee, for thou  
art wonderful.

Wonderful are  
thy works!

Ps 139, 14



You O Lord  
are mankind's  
bright sign  
Best, most beloved  
of the people  
Awake! Give  
strength to the singer

Rig-veda X 156, 5

AS A LUMINOUS SIGN of God's power and glory, the sun rises from the horizon. And man's answer is wonder — wonder about how openly, how near and clearly the Lord reveals his glory morning after morning. Man breaks forth in praise for this creator.

*He put a new song in my mouth,  
a song of praise to our God.*

A girl got up that morning even before the sun rose to await and celebrate the event of dawn. She contemplated the mild red sun-ball face to face, contemplated it with steadfast gaze. She went into the open to see more freely, to stand before the sun with her whole body.

*Praise him, sun and moon,  
praise him, shining stars!*

She raised her arms to touch the sun. Her body stretched forward to her, but she could not reach the



sun. She began to walk towards her, along ways first, then across meadows. Yet while she looked and walked, the brightness of the sun grew and became burning and naked.

*Praise him, highest heavens,  
and waters above the heavens!*

It was the time of spring. The flower-trees had blossomed in red and yellow and pale-rose colours; in the crisp morning sun they stood fragile and delicate, and yet as if made for eternity. The men, with bundles on their head, were on their way already, taking lively strides.

*Let them praise the name of the Lord!  
For he commanded and they were created.  
And he established them for ever and ever;  
he fixed their bounds which cannot be passed.*

The girl went with outstretched hands, but suddenly she had to cover her eyes, so much the sun burnt in them. Dazzled, with closed lids, she stood still. Had she not gone outside to unite herself with the glory of God? And now, so burning is his glory?

When she opened her eyes again, she discerned around herself branches and twigs of the trees in the pure air. Men passed by, some quietly, others with a song. The bustle of the day had begun, the day was no

longer new. She had wanted to become one with the glory of God, the little girl.

*Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
for his name alone is exalted.*

But have not, in the beginning, God and man been one? So it is told. God and man were one being, and then they separated. Not because man broke away from God in revolt, not because God and man became estranged from each other, but in order to love each other. So that God could love men and they could love and praise their creator. For praise is possible only for the other, when there are two. Only he who can raise his hands to God who is far away, can sing a song of praise. Wondrous love is in search of the Other, of the Many. It wants to praise the beloved Lord who shows himself in many guises.

So the girl returns home, contemplating the meadows with their dew, the flower-trees, the eager and vigorous bustle of the people. Is it not that the whole sunlit creation praises God from its separation? Indeed, in their own way even the forces of darkness and destruction praise the creator.

*Praise the Lord from the earth,  
sea-monsters and all the deeps,  
fire and hail, snow and frost,  
stormy wind fulfilling his command!*




They praise because once they have been one with Him and have received His law and a reflection of His glory. While praise rises, a divine light lies on the whole, of creation.











His anger  
is but for a moment  
and his favour is  
for a lifetime. Weeping  
may tarry for the night,  
but joy comes with  
the morning

Ps 30,5



Chastity  
is a wealth that  
comes from abundance  
of love

Rabindranath Tagore



*My heart is steadfast, O God,  
I will sing and make melody!  
Awake, my soul!  
Awake, O harp and lyre!  
I will awake the dawn!*

The *brahmachārī* rises from his sleep before it is yet light. He goes to the river to take a bath in order to wash himself in the pure element of flowing water, also to purify himself internally, so that he may greet the day with dignity. The dawn appears like a beautiful goddess — forever young, ever joyful; it awakens in men new vigour and hope. Standing in the water, the *brahmachārī* bows down before her with folded hands. It is the hour when God listens to the prayer of human beings with special favour. The light of dawn fills all things with an inner luminosity, as if light and matter, the divine and the world, were still one.



With the rising sun, this sense of quiet but brief union ends. The *brahmachārī* returns to the *āshrama* where he learns at the feet of the *guru*. The day has begun and its promises call for their fulfilment. In the house the *brahmachārī* celebrates the fire-sacrifice. Each morning and evening, when the night gives way to the day and the day to the night, he kindles the fire and waves the lamp while uttering the prescribed *mantras*. The life of all living creatures is in need of light. The sun illumines the world so that life in it may flourish. In thanksgiving each family kindles the fire, bringing the light of the sun down to their homes in order to partake of the cosmic event of dawn, and also through an act of sacrifice ensure the continuity of the sun's course.

Thus man and cosmos are bound together in loyalty. The sun is the sign and promise of continuity and steadiness of life, of the favour and love of God which continues a lifetime. And with fire sacrifice, man recognises the sign, and responds with shouts of joy. He answers with the flame which he himself enkindles and tends, with a light which is from the source of all light — the Sun, and a reflection of God's glory.

*This is the day which the Lord has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

The confidence of man in God's steadfastness takes its strength from a covenant, a vow between God and man which has existed from the very beginning, but which

must be consciously renewed by every man. It is the vow to be what God and man are meant to be : Creator and creature, image and likening; and what man and man are meant to be to each other : brother and sister, husband and wife, a peaceful community.

This vow is for us the school of love — not of that love which throws itself away in an excess of feeling to God and men, but of the love of both good and difficult hours, of the love which endures in the temptations of disloyalty. The fulfilled vow celebrates the most beautiful aspect of love : its steadiness.

The *brahmachāri* has taken the vow to lead a chaste life as long as he lives in the house of the *guru*, receiving instructions from him. From his lips he hears the Holy Scripture and tries to fathom the depth of its meaning. The vow concentrates will and feeling on this holy endeavour. The tending of the sacred fire in the *guru's* house, which is the traditional duty of a *brahmachāri*, is the symbol both of the constancy of his endeavour and of its purity — for what is purer than the flame ?

The fulfilment of each vow — be it that of a *brahmachāri*, of a married couple, or of a people — gathers within man a spiritual power. A vow admits to human weakness, but demonstrates the determination to struggle against it. A vow knows of and honours God's infallible love and His just strictness. God is the absolute measure.



To be bound by a vow to Him means not to lose the measure of our life in times of weakness.

*If David's children forsake my law,  
and do not walk according to my ordinances;  
if they violate my statutes,  
and do not keep my commandments;  
then I will punish their transgression  
with the rod,  
and their iniquity with scourges;  
but I will not remove from him my steadfast love,  
or be false to my faithfulness.  
I will not violate my covenant,  
or alter the word that went forth from my lips.*

The spiritual power which wells from the fulfilment of a vow, surrenders itself as selfless love to God and his creation. It is the oil needed that love may burn and not die. From the vow of a *brahmachārī* grows the love to God through the study of Sacred Scripture; from the vow of a married couple grows the love for God through mutually trusting love; from the covenant of a people arises the unity of the people and the authority of their deeds.

The vow thus is the school of love. At the same time love is the wealth through which the *brahmachārī*, the married couple and the people penetrate deeper into the essence of their vow. Their lives become meaningful

and worthwhile. There is no more need then for mere ritual sacrifice.

*Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,  
and pay your vows to the Most High;  
and call upon me in the day of trouble;  
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.*



(7) Śrīrāgāśa Rāsa

YEARNING

lit. adornment

devotion

The *bhakti* literature of India is overflowing with songs of yearning, of expectation, of pining for the beloved, for God. The most popular variation of this theme in Hinduism is the love between the youthful God Krishna whose play on the flute enchants all people, particularly the simple milkmaids of Vrindāvan. The second meditation draws from the bridal mysticism of the Krishna story which is mainly based on the *Srīmad Bhāgavatam*.

The people of the psalms have, while in exile (psalm 41), experienced a powerful yearning for God's presence, for union with God in the divine services in the temple of Jerusalem.

In the first meditation we have chosen the motive of yearning in nature and, with her, of the farmers for rain. In agrarian India God gives life to man through the annual monsoon.







Soul  
waits for the  
Lord

more than watchman  
for the morning.

Ps 130, 6



My eyes  
are thirsty  
for your sight  
Look friend, the day  
has passed watching  
the road. Sorrow  
has covered my eyes

Mirahai

THE SUN HAS BURNT unto the country for weeks, unmitigated by a cloud or by a drop of rain. During the day, to escape the scorching heat, people sit crouched in their huts, in darkness, and languish. The cattle no longer find nourishment in the burnt up grass; in the evening they moan in their sheds. Nature seems to be petrified with the heat. Hot dust covers the paths. Fasting and with ashes heaped on her head, nature seems to be praying that it may rain.

The field is cracked all over with the heat; only thistles flourish and pierce far into the vibrating air. The sad sight of his dear earth is painful to the farmer. He loves his field. The earth provides them all with food; she is indeed their second mother: Who could live without her? He has ploughed his field and waits that a wind may stir the air, that a cloud may appear on the horizon — the first sign of the monsoon.



There was quarrelling in the farmer's family — one accused the other of having blemished his honour. The quarrelsome disputes would continue all day long; they would eat with their backs turned to each other. Another hears noises from other huts and suspects that those people are speaking ill of him. Tempers get frayed; there is absence of good feeling. Only the thistles grow.

One farmer waits silently, fasting like everything else in nature. The heat of the air is unbearable; even the nights are heavy. He keeps awake, tossing restlessly while the children cry in their half-slumber.

*I think of thee upon my bed,  
and meditate on thee in the watches of the night;  
for thou hast been my help . . .*

The next dawn will spread across the eastern horizon at its destined hour; the night is long, but not endless. The monsoon with the nourishing moisture, my God, thou may send along with the dawn, or thou may not. Who knows thy ways? How often, the farmer recalls, has the rain stayed away — and they had to hunger the year through. Heavy rain clouds appeared and then lost themselves on the far horizon. The farmer had stood in the middle of the field with outstretched hands, yet no drop had fallen. No, longing alone could not bring about fulfilment.

Why then does the farmer still wait in his hut keeping a lonely vigil, like a lover? His elder brother ridicules

him, his wife follows the advice of her gossiping neighbour-women. Even his father, the head of the family, squats in a corner, drawing at his hubble-bubble, and remains silent.

One evening the farmer does not lie down on the mat next to his wife. He leaves his homestead, goes along the dark dust-paths to the edge of the fields. There, in the heavy shadow of the palm-trees he sits down and continues the vigil. Like the watchman at the gate like a sharp-cornered rock, he is resolved to wait and endure.

*Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord!  
Lord, hear my voice!*

The night strides on relentlessly. The stars stand in clear darkness and wander along on their course. The cool moon diffuses its light across the impoverished earth.

The strain of long waiting and of physical weakness is so great that it makes a dent in his resolution. He wants to break his fast, wants to eat and drink and go and rest. Yet he cannot. The farmer wants to live — he and all farmers want only life. With the whole power of his life he yearns for the God of life.

When a feeble glimmer in the east drives away darkness, a small wind arises. The farmer goes over the



lumpy, hard ground. He feels the soil sticking to the soles of his feet. He touches the field, the grass and the bushes and finds that his hands are moist with dew. When the sun rises, it looks at him mildly with half closed lids. The farmer seems to be covered with dew, as if a tear from God's eye had fallen on him. For God it is the tear of sorrow for the parched ground, but the farmer receives it in joy. To him it is the fulfilment of God's promise that his long night's vigil will not be in vain.

Has his deep yearning after all drawn fulfilment to the earth, as the dawn follows the night, irrevocably?

The first rains pour down on that day. Mother Earth receives her long-awaited children, the raindrops, and presses them to her bosom.

*Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving;  
make melody to our God upon the lyre!  
He covers the heavens with clouds,  
he prepares rain for the earth,  
he makes grass grow upon the hills.  
He gives to the beasts their food,  
and to the young ravens which cry.*





As a  
hart

longs for  
flowing streams,  
so longs my soul  
for thee,  
O God.

Ps 42,1

Never Let our  
Love seem to grow stale,  
I beg you, Let the  
dew not dry on our  
flowers

Vidyapati

THE RAINS HAVE arrived. It is the month of *srāvan*. Fresh green is sprouting everywhere out of the rain-sodden earth. Every evening clouds accumulate, a quick wind arises and showers of rain precipitate on to the landscape, accompanied by lightning and thunder. The air is soaked with moisture so that it glitters in the light. The coconut-trees grow luxuriously, stretching out their leaves on all sides, almost touching the ground. The frogs croak in the high grass, and in the bamboo-thicket the *koel*-bird plays its seductive, ever rising melody. Every heart feels rapturous. *Srāvan* is the month of love. Nature celebrates a feast, so also our hearts yearn to celebrate.

The clouds of *srāvan* rain, my friend,  
of *srāvan*, pleasing to the heart.  
In *srāvan* my heart is filled with joy  
for I have heard the rumour of Shyam's coming.

The deer of the forests drink from living waters which can hardly contain their overflowing fulness. The heart of man, which conceives fulfilment in nature all around, desires, too, to pour out itself in its own fulfilment. Everything seems to hint at the coming of the Lord. The heart seeks the beloved, he who understands the love of one's heart.

*My soul thirsts for God,  
for the living God.  
When shall I come and behold  
the face of God?*

The yearning of the heart does not bring the beloved Lord closer; in fact, it seems to place unending hills and



valleys and lands between them. And yet, the yearning cannot fade away. In the cover of darkness the heart, like a lover, leaves the house to seek the face of God. The heart leaves its exile to seek its home. Where the home is, how to find it and what home is like—that the heart does not know; it only knows: When I have arrived I shall recognize the Lord.

*My tears have been my food  
day and night,  
for men say to me continually,  
"Where is your God?"*

On the way the lover of the Lord is not deterred by threatening dark clouds. The night is transformed by the fire of longing into day, the dense forest into a familiar place and the pathless thicket appears to be a smooth passage.

To see God face to face! To bow before him to the ground, to touch his feet reverently! To see him once only, the beloved God, how his wonderful body reclines against a tree as he is waiting for the beloved. In yearning for the vision of God the beloved hurries through the forest. A thorny twig clings to her garment: she looks back – and stops, startled. It is as if she had seen the bright face of the Lord before it disappeared behind the trees. She returns and finds nobody. A peacock cries in the tree; she looks up and there shines the face of God through the dense foliage, and disappears. Again and again she stops in terror, for everywhere God's face appears – and disappears again. She loses the way, for

each way seems to lead towards God, but none takes her to the destination.

*Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my help and my God.*

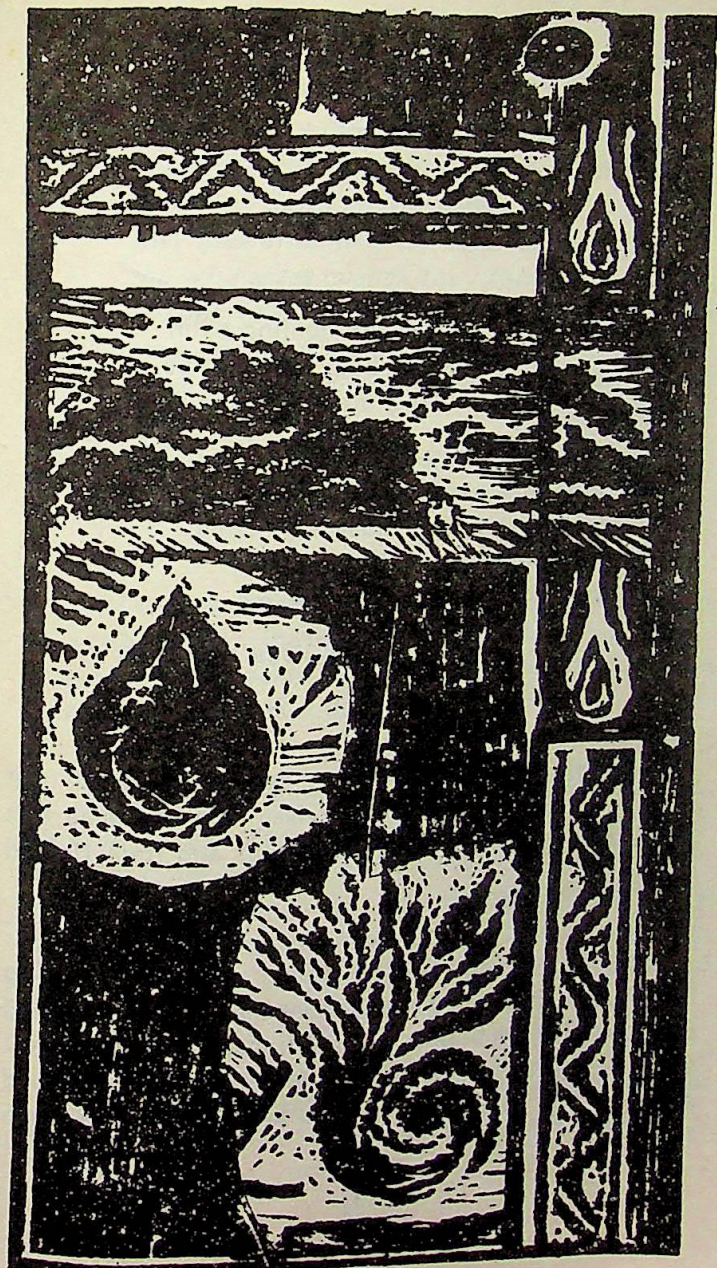
When she reaches the river-bank, the full moon pours its light into the scene which looks touched as if by magic. Then suddenly, she hears the flute being played; God calls, God beckons, he awakens in us a deep love-desire.

At the sound of his flute, so it is said, the river began to flow backwards, the moon became bigger and more luminous so that it may discover the divine player in his hiding place, the deer on the meadows near the river raised their heads and stopped chewing, the birds became still—the whole of nature listened with abated breath when the Lord played. And how beautiful his play is:

*These things I remember,  
as I pour out my soul;  
how I went with the throng,  
and led them in procession to the house of God,  
with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving,  
a multitude keeping festival.*

The air is rent with the sound of the flute. The flute is on the lips of the Lord. But where is He? In amazement the lover of the Lord praises Him, who is present and penetrates everywhere, and yet eludes her. So she remains for always on the way to Him.





## WATER

(Āpah)

O Waters, stored with healing balm  
through which my body safe will be,  
come, that I long may see the sun.

Whatever sin is found in me,  
whatever wrong I may have done,  
if I have lied or falsely sworn,  
Waters, remove it far from me.

*Rig-Veda X, 9, 7-8*

From fire, from its inner core, came water. From heat  
arose coolness, from that what rises upwards came that  
which falls downwards, from colour and form flowed  
taste.

Creation further unfolds itself. After the fleeting  
flaming fire is created the element that brings ease and  
calm; after the luminous fire the transparent water, soft  
and flowing; after the awesome destructive varied-formed  
element, the element which embraces and fills each  
form.



*Thou didst set a bound to the waters  
which they should not pass,  
so that they might not again cover the earth.  
Thou makest springs gush forth in the valleys,  
they flow between the hills,  
they give drink to every beast of the field;  
the wild asses quench their thirst.  
By them the birds of the air have their habitation;  
they sing among the branches.  
From thy lofty abode thou waterest the  
mountains;  
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy  
work.*

God created water, and ever since it has sprung from the earth and from the rocks; it runs in rivulets and rivers, unites itself in streams, and flows on until it pours into the ocean and becomes the ocean.

Without water the earth is a desert. Deep down into the body of the earth man digs to fetch water, and he returns it to the earth so that he may live from her fruits. The farmer squats on his arid, eroded field waiting for the monsoon rains to come. Without water there is no rice, no bread — there is only hunger, sorrow, disease and despair.

Water is the feminine, fructifying element; the manly vigour of the earth is in need of water to come to life.

All animate things to be able to continue to live need the 'inanimate' water, which itself needs nothing in order to be. It is indeed a mysterious element, patient and still, which without being itself 'living' sustains life in others. That is why water is considered to be the symbol of dedication.

There is the hurriedly flowing water running in a broad stream which in eternal youth and freshness never exhausts itself: this is Life. And then there is the deep gorge of age-old waters when the flood covered the earth, when nothing grew and nothing was under its heavy mass: This stands as the symbol of the Uncreated before and after creation. Into these still waters the neophyte is immersed in order to rise up again, created anew. For these still waters are *Holy Waters*. They do not fructify and invigorate life, but they are the source of Life itself. Into this wide, unformed Being each form can sink and become united; and this Being can fill any form and unites itself with it. "

In water all possibilities of Being are contained. Immersing himself in it the neophyte partakes of the fullness of Being and ascends invigorated. Likewise the Indian pilgrim cleanses himself from sin when he bathes in the Ganga, or Jamuna or Godavari or any other sacred river. These sacred waters well up also within us. They are the waters of quiet contemplation, which softly touch us, and fill us with patience and peace.



The people in the desert, when wandering and mourning in its terrible loneliness, were filled with relief and gratitude tasting the life-giving water. The psalmist says :

*He opened the rock, and water gushed forth;  
it flowed through the desert like a river.*

And God's Flood was the sign of the Not-Yet and No-More of the Uncreated.

*Thou didst cover the earth with the  
deep waters as with a garment,  
the waters stood above the mountains.*

The *Inward Wanderer* unites himself with the still waters of the Uncreated to be created anew, to experience as it were rebirth after death, after one's dissolution in the element. What a joy, he says, it is to enter into the ocean before sunrise, naked, clothed only with the pure elements of air and water, and to stand in the water breast-deep, celebrating the rising of the sun, the fire of the sky at the outer end of space.

The *Outward Wanderer* flows with the life-giving waters, along with the current of life, flowing around and flowing through the manifold forms of life, forever

ready to touch them to be fructified, and to fill out ever new forms. He flows downward wanting to be closer and closer to the earth, the final fullness. He seeks not the pure elements which are separate from one another, but their mixture, the ever new mixtures of the elements.



(8) BĪBHATSA RASA

SORROW (lir. disgust)

Sorrow — that is existential homelessness. The people of Israel intoned songs of sorrow when they yearned for their homeland in exile. And Rāma, the hero of the epic "Rāmāyana", receives at the proudest moment of his life — when he was about to be crowned king — the news that he is being sent into exile.

Has not each man a right to a homeland? The right to sustain his life from the land inherited by his ancestors, the right to live in the house sanctified by generations of his family? Exactly because exile is so unnatural, the refugee and outcaste see in it a self-denial of God. True, God is everywhere—but man yearns to experience Him in his home, for this is the place where God acquires a deeper, symbolic meaning to man. God speaks to us in our mother-tongue.


There is an "inner exile", also, an estrangement while at home, a denial of God despite home and hearth. On this we meditate in the second text. Suddenly the word home becomes deceptive; the philosophical idea of *māyā* is a signal of this feeling. *Māyā* does deceive men and lead them astray, yet, as a power in the hands of God, it may also draw them back to Him.





 How shall  
we sing the  
Lord's song in  
a foreign land?

PS 137, 4

 When I am  
parted from my  
Beloved, my heart is  
full of misery: I  
have no comfort in  
the day; I have no  
sleep in the night  
To whom, shall  
I tell my sorrow?  
Kahir

PRINCE RĀMA, a celebrated hero since his youth, waited for the greatest moment of his life, for his coronation as the successor of his father. The ceremony was to take place in the early morning. Sumptuously adorned, with a large entourage, he strode to the king's bedchamber to take him to the ceremony. The king's face was distorted with pain when he caught sight of his son. What had happened? Last night one of the queens had reminded him of a vow : He had to fulfil her one wish, no matter what it might be. And she wished, she said, that Rāma be sent into exile to the forest while her own son should ascend to the throne. Rāma listened silently. The whole festive congregation felt benumbed, his father was inconsolable.

On the day that should have witnessed his coronation, Rāma gave away his wealth, took bark for clothing and left the city bare-footed. The houses were still



decorated by colourful flags, the people still wore festive clothes. They surged towards their beloved Rāma, who moved forward with downcast eyes.

*Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing;  
O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled.*

Sorrow must communicate itself, must overflow when it inundates the heart, into mourning and song. What have I done to merit such fate, asks the sorrowing man. How long will the evil-doers and enemies live, waiting in ambush to entrap me? Have I not always wanted what was good? How long, Lord, Lord, will you remain far from those who seek to do good?

*Turn, O Lord, save my life;  
deliver me for the sake of thy steadfast love.*

Sorrow must communicate itself — but to whom? If God were near, if He bent low his ear, sorrow would soon be soothed. For then we could learn to *understand*. But the sorrowing man sits in the hut of his exile, listening perhaps to the merry noise of the crowds in the distance, but who would listen to him?

*My soul is sorely troubled,  
But thou, O Lord — how long?*

Men who see the sorrowful avoid them as if their bodies were infested by contagious diseases. Men do not

care to see how the casteless live outside the village in their destitute huts, and how they walk in the day's heat for hours to fetch water. Men do not care to look at the children who, barely ten years of age, work on the fields of big landowners from dawn to dusk. They do not ask questions, for they do not wish to be shocked by the answers.

*I am weary with my moaning;  
every night I flood my bed with tears;  
I drench my couch with weeping.  
My eye wastes away because of grief,  
it grows weak because of all my foes.*

Through the streets of the city the destitute boy walks and collects bits of old paper into a big sack. He rummages in heaps of filth in the gutter, on garbage dumps and in backalley yards, this brown, naked boy who has never gone to school because he must rummage in heaps of filth to stay alive.

*But I am a worm, and no man;  
scorned by men, and despised by the people.*

Man who once tilled the land has been driven out of his village because of the scarcity of food; he has gone to the city in the hope of work. The cries of his children asking for food echo through his head even while he sleeps in the big unknown city on the pavement, all lonely despite the thousand feet passing by him.



*How long must I bear pain in my soul,  
and have sorrow in my heart all the day?*

Sorrow rises in them like an ocean. It surges upwards, but does not cross their lips. Their lips remain closed. That is the song of sorrowing men.





The Lord  
is near to the  
broken-hearted  
and saves  
the crushed  
in spirit

Ps 34, 18

Deliver  
me from my own  
shadows, my Lord,  
from the wrecks and  
confusion of my days.

Rabindranath Tagore

*Do not cast me off in the time of old age;  
forsake me not when my strength is spent.*

The hermit had spent many years in this cave seeking life in God. Then he became old and frail. And he began to look back for the first time, and grew sorrowful. At night he lay awake, with darkness all around, black and empty, mindful only of his sorrow which touched him, groped after him, bound him as if with strings so that he felt he would suffocate.

But the hermit, bound to his vows, did not wish to leave the cave. He wanted to endure. He had spent his life in *tapas*, in asceticism, whose fire had slowly and gradually burnt off all the impurities of his thinking and feeling. Squeezed inside this cleavage in the rock, he had been ablaze for a long time as if with fire. He had endured the heat of his inner fire, indeed all he



possessed — his joys and disappointments — he had consigned to these flames so that they may be burnt to ashes.

Now, being old and frail, the hermit had become cold and felt as if petrified. There he sat inside the rock as in a reversed pot, emptied and bereft of the power ever to contain anything.

*Lord, let me know my end,  
and what is the measure of my days;  
let me know how fleeting my life is !*

The earth had kept him lovingly contained within herself for a long time as if he were a ruby. But when the body had become gaunt and troublesome from fasting and age, then the earth burst upon him in vengeance, rushed against this body before it could unite itself with her peacefully.

*Behold, thou hast made my days a few  
handbreadths,  
and my lifetime is as nothing in thy sight.  
Surely every man stands as a mere breath !*

The hermit, the good man, reviewed his life with terrible remorse. The long-gone experiences of his youth, of his adolescence and the vigorous years of mature manhood, threw long shadows across his old life. The

breath which had climbed up and down within him since birth, suddenly appeared to him unclean, and his whole body seemed to be tainted by a thousand touches which clung to his flesh as the flesh clings to the bones. Nothing would cleanse the body, no ascetic fire, no water of prayer and contemplation.

*Surely man goes about as a shadow !  
Surely for naught are they in turmoil ;  
man heaps up, and knows not who will gather !*

Like this, life with its hopes and aims which the will had set itself, is being wasted; at the end of one's lifetime, says the hermit, what more remains but shadows and the sorrow, never to be able to reach the sun? What remains is the fact of one's mortality which extinguishes every fire and sucks up every drop of water.

Life becomes small and weak, but its rifts and shadows grow wider. This is *māyā*, says the hermit, from whose arms there is no escape. We throw ourselves at her breasts and she smothers us in her embrace. We love life, receive its pleasures like a prince who says he has a right to them; and then life hits back, throws us unto the sick bed, into the gutter, into the eternal nights of anguish. And yet with clenched teeth we still continue to love life. Or like the hermit, we renounce the world and practise asceticism and declare that we do not want



anything from life. And what happens? We love asceticism instead of pleasures, love fevers and poverty and wish to continue to love them ungrudgingly. Yet when asceticism, illness, poverty and our pleasures bring to us the forebodings of the irrevocable, of death, or worse still of emptiness, then we are terrified in our deepest core. We then try desperately even to love death and this emptiness, just in case there may be a trace of life hidden in them somewhere.

This is *māyā*, says the hermit, engulfing us in its rampant growth. This denser and more and more intricately interweaving mass of life is pushing upwards towards light and air, overgrowing and smothering everything that lies below. Its entwining shoots grow all the more luxuriant by the tropical rains of our unending greed for life.

*I am dumb, I do not open my mouth,  
for it is thou who hast done it.  
Remove thy stroke from me;  
I am spent by the blows of thy hand.*

This *māyā* is the magic spell which God himself has cast over men, which He has cast over us like a reversed pot from which we cannot escape. But why, Lord, why? In order to understand God we shall have to cross the realm of *māyā* first, but *māyā* knows no straight paths. At life's end we become sorrowful and resigned because our eyes have wandered in all directions, looking for a

way out, only to realise how intertwined and steep the pathways are.

The hermit in his rock felt one evening how night was descending on earth; and with the descent of night, he knew, his tribulations would grow. But that evening he observed from the rock an orange-red, majestic moon, the like of which he had never seen before, rising from the horizon. Big is the moon in India and domineering. This great vessel, overflowing with the elixir of light and life, stood motionless behind the black shapes of many cornered palm-leaves, which trembled gently in the evening air. The moon glowed behind the fronds of the palm-leaves, vibrated between them, playing silently with the dark of the night. What a mystery !

My God ! exclaimed the hermit in that night. The Absolute seemed to play with the forms of the earth. My God ! he said slowly. And he remembered one verse of Kabir : "There is a land in which doubt and sorrow are powerless : Where the terror of death is no more " The orange-red ascent of the moon — so near, my God, and yet mysteriously unapproachable and eternal !

*Of old thou didst lay the foundation of the earth,  
and the heavens are the work of thy hands.  
They will perish, but thou dost endure;  
they will all wear out like a garment.  
But thou art the same, and thy years  
have no end.*




PEACE

To seek peace, to return to peace, to be at peace with oneself, with God, and with men — is that not one of the strongest impulses of which religious man is capable? Is that not the aim of all his actions? Hinduism has found consoling answers; it insists that peace *is*, despite peacelessness, only we must look deeper, still deeper "to be in peace".

The people of the psalms experience peace in its fulness when God blesses the righteous man, protects the orphans and the poor, when all of them — the whole people — "conquer the land". And this leads us to the meditation on the Earth, which is the land given to all of us by God.



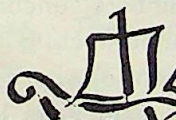




He made  
the storm be still,  
and the waves of  
the sea were hushed.

Then they were glad  
because they had quiet,  
and he brought them  
to their desired haven

PS 107, 29-30



Call out  
again and again my  
Lord, I desire you, I  
am surrounded by this  
samsara, this ocean  
of imperfection  
My boat is punctured;  
Lord, put up the sail  
Mirabai

VISHNU, THE SUPREME LORD, from whom at the beginning the universe evolved, again dissolves all created things at the end of time and draws them within himself. Then he reclines on the unmoving, endless primal waters to sleep. The entire world slumbers, unconscious of itself, within Vishnu, like the unborn child in mother's womb...until the Day of Creation dawns again. The Peace of the Uncreated reigns, God rests in his own divinity, selfcontented.

Sleeping Vishnu dreams of the new world. Within himself lovely landscapes form, hermitages in which his name is praised aloud by holy men and women. They live in concord and peace. Vishnu awakes and unfolds his vision. It grows out of him, emerges from the primal waters of Non-being into the Being of name and form. For a while longer peace glows among creatures, then discord erupts, greed, selfish pleasure. They have fallen out of God's dream, out of the unity with God. And yet,



after uncounted human years of decline, Vishnu will again take them to himself and renew peace and concord.

Name and Form, *my* name and *my* body, *my* success, *my* pleasure, *my* comfort: This is how we slip from God's dream of Peace. We get entangled in the web of life, try to force our way out only to get entangled deeper—there is no breaking free. And yet they are threads woven from our own selfishness. The Hindu uses the image of *samsāra*: When creation seems to bulge out of the still waters in mountains of waves, building multifarious forms, the primal waters become the ever-moving Ocean of Life in which we, with our tiny lifeboats, navigate, tossed back and forth by the waves. The divine incarnations, the great *rishis* and saints, are *tirthankars*, the "Crossing-Makers", who for the first time crossed this ocean of life and have reached the further shore. They show the way, lead us to the Beyond.

*Thy way was through the sea,  
thy path through the great waters;  
yet thy footprints were unseen.  
Thou didst lead thy people like a flock  
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.*

*Actually* (the Hindu says), this ever-moving ocean of *samsāra* is but water—pure, undivided, contained in itself. The waves too are nothing but water, the wide ocean. He who understands this can taste and smell the

divine primal waters even when he is within this wild *samsāra*. It depends on the perspective from which our mind chooses to view life. The suitable attitude of thinking and feeling alone results in peace. "*Samsāra* is really only in thoughts. They should be purified with great effort." Is our thinking pure, calm, smooth? For only then the spirit will be able to look through the waves into the divinity of its own ground.

*The cords of death encompassed me,  
the torrents of perdition assailed me.  
In my distress I called upon the Lord;  
to my God I cried for help.*


There, on our own ground, God is as the Eternal witness who observes from within how we, wavering between pain and joy, move from moment to moment. He himself remains unmoved and uninvolved. God the Illuminator—who enkindles the suns and fires, who throws his light on our thinking and feeling so that his creatures may think and feel and live—himself receives light from no other source. There is God who touches us in every word and gesture and who permeates all things, yet himself he remains untouched and invisible. Let us swim against the currents of life towards our sources: let us bathe ourselves therein and have peace.




*He reached from on high, he took me,  
he drew me out of many waters.*







In peace  
I will both lie  
down and sleep;  
for thou alone, O Lord,  
makest me dwell  
in safety  
Ps 4,8



PEACE be to  
the Earth and to the Air!  
PEACE be to Heaven,  
PEACE to the Waters!  
By this invocation  
of peace may  
peace bring  
PEACE!  
ATHARVA VEDA XIX 914

AFTER THE HARSH GLARE of the summer day, the evening softens again the human heart. In the heat, in its wavering air, nature had waited as if petrified. No bird had swung itself off its tree, no flower had opened. Turned inwards, nature awaited the small wind which is the messenger of the evening. Then the light grew mild and transparent. Nature preens and smarts its feathers, dusty with heat. The tropical drama of sunset ensues. It is powerful and yet it fills the spectator with indescribable peace. Light streams on the waves of air, penetrates forests and bushes, dissolving their forms in luminous warmth. The feeling of community is strong in the world; nature, animals and men, seem to unite themselves peacefully. All of a sudden, we divine "the whole" of which we have always seen but parts, before our eyes. We divine the "All" around us with ourselves engulfed in it. We divine it within the nearness of the evening landscape whose glow is yet a message of distance and width. Peace does not rest on immovable, dead things, but on



whatever possesses a soul, on whatever is ecstatic, celebrating the paradox of the unity of matter and the transcendent.

*This is the day which the Lord has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

The time of sunset is dedicated to worship. The conchshells blow while the cows trek their way on the dust-path homewards. In the ponds and at the wells the men wash off the sweat of field-work. Clad in only fresh, white dhotis, with chests naked as a sign of humility, they come to the temple to perform *ārati*, the ritual waving of lights before the deity. The air is full of the sound of gongs and drums, of clouds of incense and of song. Outside crickets chirp, busy weaving the black cloth of the night.

Peace means to recognise harmony and to see ourselves within that harmony. The Hindu experiences consciously the cosmic rhythms of sunrise and sunset, the movements of stars and change of seasons; he knows that these cycles also flow through his own life. He is bound up in nature not merely for the satisfaction of his natural impulses, but also his entire life—in his communion with fellow-men, in his thinking and feeling and actions—he has to conform to the cosmic order, *rita*, if he wants to fulfil his life. *Rita* is impersonal, yet not unfeeling and blind. Truth, *satya*, is the power which energises it. Truth is the flow of energy which runs through the cosmos,

penetrating everything; it is not a mere static "correctness". In rites, meditations, in a pure, dutiful life, man seeks to enter this flow of energy allowing himself to be moved on by the current. "Through Truth the earth is sustained"—and he who himself is *true*, will also be protected by Truth. In other words, he experiences Peace in his heart: armoured with Truth he perceives the Great Plan even in the midst of peacelessness. Even Untruth would, along with its boastful power, tumble, if Truth did not exist.

The fruit of this discerning peace is trust in God, the King of Peace, in his ultimate, overcoming Truth and Justice. The truthful person can live his life in Peace.

*May he live while the sun endures,  
and as long as the moon, throughout all  
generations !  
May he be like rain that falls in the mown grass,  
like showers that water the earth !  
In his days may righteousness flourish,  
and peace abound, till the moon be no more !*

The godless will perish, while God will sustain the just who flow along in the stream of cosmic order and truth.

*Wait for the Lord, and keep to his way,  
and he will exalt you to possess the land;  
you will look on the destruction of the wicked.*



Darkness has fallen into the palm trees. For a moment they have stood back in bizarre forms against the red western sky, then they too sink into the undivided blackness of the night. There are no more shadows. The hearts of men become still and relieved. Under a tree or on the veranda some sit meditating—upright in yogic posture, the legs firmly touching the ground, their hands resting on their knees, their eyes closed, turned inwards. It is a rounded, self-reliant posture, proclaiming man's independence. Has he not got within himself all he needs? In meditation man assures himself of the Eternal within himself. What more does he need? Once he has deeply experienced that the Eternal which holds the entire world holds him too above day and night, joy and pain, then he feels peace.

*In God alone, my soul, seek peace,  
for what I hope for comes from him alone.*

The gladdening experience of his inward independence, namely, that no mishap or sorrow can estrange man from this peace, is made whole by the experience that he is part of *rita*, is supported by her, and himself supports her. If there were no peace all around and within nature and among men, how could he find it in himself? It is like the air of which all creatures partake equally in order to live. So, filled with peace, he gives it to others. And, seeking peace he wishes it to everyone. The *sānti-mantra*, the peace-wish, is the beginning and conclusion

of every rite, every meditation and religious celebration. Man purifies them by the power of his will for peace.

*'Om, Sānti, Sānti, Sānti,'* he recites. Peace to heavens, peace to the airy regions, peace on earth ! With this wish on his lips he lies down to rest. In sleep he experiences, as in meditation, the assurance of the eternity of his own being; he sinks deeper and deeper within himself beyond dreams, and, from his own depth, spreads peace over the nightly cosmos.





## EARTH

(Prithivī)

The Earth, untrammelled in the midst of men,  
adorned with heights and gentle slopes  
and plains,  
bears plants and herbs of various healing powers.  
May she spread wide for us, afford us joy!

To Earth belong the four directions of space.  
On her grows food, on her the ploughman toils.  
She carries likewise all that breathes and stirs.  
Earth, may she grant us cattle and food in plenty.

*Atharva-Veda XII, 1, 2; 4.*

And at the end God created the solid, broad earth. In her all elements are contained, undistinguished. In manifold forms, under a thousand names and in a thousand mixtures, dwell and act the elements in the crumbs of the earth. She is the ground and womb of all finer elements. Water would fall into nothingness if the earth did not carry it. Fire arises from the earth and needs her, as does the man for its nourishment. And the air is limited by the earth: the earth gives it its voice when the air throws itself against her. Only space is all encompassing, making room even for the earth so that she may become broad.

Man became full in his humanity when the earth came into being and he walked on her. The solid earth gave



work to his hands and a sure step to his feet, and to all his senses a variety of impressions.

Creation is complete; great are the deeds of the Lord !

*Bless the Lord, O my soul !*

*Thou art clothed with honour and majesty,  
who coverest thyself with light as with*

*a garment,*

*who hast stretched out the HEAVENS like a tent,  
who hast laid the beams of thy chambers  
on the waters.*

*Thou makest the clouds thy chariot,  
and ridest on the wings of the storm,  
thou makest the WINDS thy messengers.  
FIRE and flame thy ministers.*

*Thou didst cover the earth with the deep  
waters as with a garment,  
the WATERS stood above the mountains.*

*Thou didst set the EARTH on its foundations,  
so that it should never be shaken.*

As the seed in the dark ground labours to reach the light, so does man seek ever new regions for his action on the earth and with the earth, and by this he grows and becomes strong like the sprouting seed developing into a tree. In action man experiences a growing sense of

freedom. He feels his freedom amidst the play of the elements, a play in which he himself participates. He experiences himself in his vigour of work which urges him towards ever new formations of human beauty, human resistance and human power.

The farmer ploughs the earth. He ploughs the ground with a wooden "thorn" that would not go deep lest he should wound mother earth. The farmer gathers harvest from the field and wood from the forests, but just enough for his needs, so that mother earth may not lose its beauty. The sleeper rests stretched flat on the bare ground, flat like earth herself. At life's end his body burns to ashes, becoming a part of the earth in the play of fire and air. Ash is the purest form of earth, white and fragrant.

He who reclines on the earth, loving the earth, he who builds his house on her, kneading and loving its soil, or draws out water from her depths with a rope and pot, loving the full, simple earth — he indeed shares in the fragrance of her purity and in her simple, motherly being.

*Thou dost cause the grass to grow for the cattle,  
and plants for man to cultivate,  
that he may bring forth food from the earth,  
and wine to gladden the heart of man,  
oil to make his face shine,  
and bread to strengthen man's heart.*



The *Outward Wanderer* has reached his destination. His search is complete with gaining, and gaining ever new, the earth. He loves her heavy fragrance inspite of knowing fully well that it may also torture his senses and stir passions in him. He feels the mighty urge and sumptuous growth of the earth's inner vigour under his hands and discovers the selfsame vigour within him. He loves the mother earth knowing well that in her motherliness also lives a devouring greed : he loves her inspite of this fear.

The *Inward Wanderer* seeks wholeness : In space he discovered it in emptiness, in Uncreatedness, in the earth he discovers wholeness in fullness, in the totally unfolded creation. He too loves the earth and calls her his own. He calls her his own like the ploughman who digs the furrow gently and not too deeply, so that he may live and increase life; like the pilgrim who wanders upon her, touching her with his bare feet; like the monk who bathes in her holy rivers, and wears the earth-coloured garb as a sign of his renunciation, and rubs ashes on his body; like the dying man who knows that he will soon return to her.

*All beings look at thee  
to give them their food in due season.  
When thou givest to them, they gather it up;  
when thou openest thy hand, they are  
filled with good things.  
When thou hidest thy face, they are dismayed,  
when thou takest away their breath, they die,  
and return to the dust.*





## NOTES

## SPACE

**Woodcut :** Symbolic representation of empty, endless Space.

The poetic cosmogony given here follows loosely the scheme of the *Sāṅkhya* philosophy. According to it the First Cause of the universe is *prakṛiti* (matter) which, under the influence of *puruṣa* (spirit, world-soul), evolves the multiplicity of forms which make up the world. First *mahat* ("the great", world-consciousness) comes into being, therefrom evolves *aḥamkāra* (personal I-consciousness), and out of this everything else unfolds, lastly the five *tanmātras* (subtle elements), viz., sound, touch, colour (and form), taste, and smell. These are the objects of our sense-organs; from them the five *mahābhūtas* (gross elements) come into existence, viz., space, air, fire, water, and earth. They evolve from the subtle elements in such a way that from sound comes space, from sound and touch come air, etc. Thus each subtle element has a gross element as its "specific quality", viz., sound is related to space, touch to air, colour and form to fire, taste to water and smell to the earth.

- p. 2     *Energy, heat* : tapas  
*fervour of love* : kāma. This term does not exist in the  
Sāṅkhya-cosmogony.  
*the consciousness "I am"* : mahat
- p. 3     *Many who knew "I am"* : ahamkāra  
*Sound* : sabda  
*God* : the idea of a personal God is unknown in classical  
Sāṅkhya-philosophy; it does, though, appear in the Yoga-  
philosophy (God-*īśvara*) with which Sāṅkhya-metaphysics is  
linked.
- p. 4     *Dance of God's joy* : God creates the world in dance.  
*Cave of his Heart* : Guha; according to the Upanishads the  
cave of the heart is filled with *ākāśa*; it indicates the Eternal  
in man.

Psalm-quotations : 19, 1-4; 104, 1-3

## Compassion

Introduction : Psalm-quotation : 57, 1

### I

- p. 11 A story . . . Which happened in the India of today :  
"Sterilised and yet landless" by Harsh Mander. In Indian  
Express, Madras, 28-3-1979,

Psalm-quotations : 69 17-18; 40, 2-3; 69, 14; 69, 19-20; 40, 11

### II

Indian motto : Tagore's Last Poems, Translated by Shyamasree Devi  
and P Lal. A Writer's Workshop Redbird Book. Calcutta, 1972, No.1.

- p. 16 Last stage of his life : allusion to the *catur-āshramadharma*,  
the theory of the four stages of life, the last being *sannyāsā*,  
the state of monastic mendicancy.

- p. 19 His play : *lilā*.

Psalm-quotations : 78, 24-25; 105, 39; 107, 4-6; 25, 6.

## Courage

### I

Indian motto : From the "Tiruvāsagam" of Mānikkavāsagar.

- p. 24 touching of the feet : *pranāma*

Psalm-quotations : 73, 26; 121, 5-6; 146, 8-9

### II

- p. 30 *Ātman* : the human soul which united itself with *brahman*,  
the Absolute God, as the arrow unites itself with the target.  
*divine sound* : *sabda-brahman*

Psalm-quotations . 18, 28-29; 18, 21-22; 18, 36; 18, 35

## A/R

Woodcut : From Space comes Air The cloud fills the emptiness of  
Space.

- p. 37 The wild swan : *hamsa*, symbol of freedom. The swan feels  
at home on the water as well as in the air.

Psalm-quotation : 104, 3-4

## Fear

### I

Woodcut : The cloud has the shape of a *trimūrti*, the Hindu "Trinity";  
it symbolizes the various "aspects" or functions of God. One possibi-



lity of interpretation is to regard the mid-face as the Absolute God (*brahman*; God Father), and the two profiles as God as man (*īśvara*; Jesus) and woman (Mother Goddess; Holy Spirit).

Indian motto : Directed to God Rudra, the "howler" and father of the wind-gods (*maruts*).

p. 44 *The wind will bring fever* : This section is a paraphrase of Rig-veda II, 33 (to Rudra).

Psalm-quotations : 47, 2; 32, 4; 55, 4-5; 119, 120; 2, 11-12; 96, 4; 6; 9-10

## II

Indian motto : Rama Prasada's Devotional Songs. The Cult of Shakti. by Jadunath Sinha. Sinha Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1966.

p. 89 (No. 167); directed to Goddess Kālī.

p. 49 *It is Mother Kālī* : Kālī has a destructive and a protective side. She gives grace to her devotees.

*The Great Goddess Durga* : Wife of Siva, combative goddess known to destroy many demons,

*And from her brow, hot with fury, sprang off Kālī* : This is one version of Kālī's origin, cf. Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa 87, 5-23

Psalm-quotations : 29, 3; 29, 4; 29, 7-8; 28, 9; 76, 7-8; 56, 4

## Fury

Introduction : Psalm-quotations : 39, 13 27, 8-9.

## I

Woodcut : The hand-drum (*damaru*) is one of the emblems of Siva and signifies his creative and destructive activity. The drum-beat indicates the rhythm of evolution (creation) and involution (destruction) of the world.

Indian motto : Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. By M. Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1969, p. 753.

p. 57 *His stored-up sense of guilt takes on forms* : Allusion to the method of emanation often to be found in Hindu myth : The wishes and moods of the inner man take on forms externally.

p. 58 *from Time into Eternity* : *kālā* and *mahākālā* ("Great Time" = Eternity). Siva represents time and eternity and governs them.

Psalm-quotations : 102, 11; 9-10; 38, 2-3; 38, 8; 38, 4; 38 5

## II

- p. 65 *Has God Himself not sent darkness to veil* : tirobhāva-sakti; doctrin of some Indian theologians that God veils the soul of man so that through suffering he may mature and merit God's grace.
- p. 65 *with the fire of grace* : anugraha-sakti; after sufficient suffering, God enlightens the soul.
- Psalm-quotations : 89, 46; 83, 1; 13, 1; 73, 7; 73, 8; 73, 13  
27, 8-9; 103, 9; 67, 1-2

## FIRE

Woodcut : From Space and Air comes Fire. The flame symbolises Fire

Psalm-quotations : 19, 4-6; 106, 18; 78, 14; 104, 4

## Wonder

### I

- Indian motto : Directed to Agni, God of Fire.
- p. 76 *But have not, in the beginning, God and man been one ?* : Motive of *bhakti*-lore.
- Psalm-quotations : 40, 3; 148, 3; 148, 4; 148, 5-6; 148, 13,  
148, 7-8

### II

- Woodcut : Brahmachārī celebrating the *agnihotra* (fire-sacrifice).
- Indian motto : Rabindranath Tagore : Stray Birds. Macmillan & Co., London 1967, p. 19 (No. 73,).
- p. 80 *brahmachārī* : a student living in the household of his *guru*.  
*like a beautiful goddess* Usha., the dawn is revered as a youthful goddess.  
*the continuity of the sun's course* : In the late Vedic tradition it is said that the sun cannot rise if the priest does not celebrate the *agnihotra*.  
*a reflection of God's glory* : An important part of the Hindu's morning prayer is the *gāyatrī-māntṛa*, which he recites turned towards the sun : "Om I We reverently meditate on the glory of God. Fill us with spiritual strength." (Rig-Veda III, 62, 10).
- Psalm-quotations : 108, 1-2; 118, 24; 89, 30-34; 50, 14-15



## Yearning

### I

Indian motto : Usha Nielsson · Mirabai. Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1977 (2nd edition), p. 50 (No. 15)

Psalm-quotations : 63, 6-7; 130, 1-2; 147, 7-9

### II

Woodcut : The overflowing pot (*pūrṇa kumbha*) is the symbol of fulness. On top of it is the sprouting coconut which, too, is a symbol of life, fertility and fulness used in many sacrifices and rites.

Indian motto : In Praise of Krishna Songs from the Bengali. Translated by Edward C. Dimock Jr and Denise Levertov. Jonathan Cape, London, 1967, p. 58 (To Krishna).

p. 94 *srāvan* : mid-July to mid-August

*The clouds . . . of Shyam's coming* : by Mirabai. From : Nielsson . Mirabai p. 63 (No. 42).

*Shyam* : Lord Krishna.

Psalm-quotations : 42, 2; 42, 3; 42, 5; 42, 4

## WATER

Woodcut : From Space, Air and Fire comes Water The drop symbolises Water.

p. 100 *the Uncreated before and after creation* : According to Indian mythology Vishnu creates the world from the primeval waters and dissolves it again therein.

Psalm-quotations : 104, 9-13; 105, 41; 104, 6

## Sorrow

### I

Indian motto : Rabindranath Tagore : One Hundred Poems of Kabir Macmillan & Co., London, 1962, p. 57 (No. 52).

p. 106 *Prince Rāma* : This scene is the beginning of the epic "Rāmāyana".

Psalm-quotations : 6, 2; 6, 4; 6, 3; 6, 6-7; 22, 6; 13, 2

## II

Indian motto : Rabindranath Tagore : *Lover's Gift and Crossing*.  
Macmillan & Co., Madras 1979, p. 52 (No. 7 of Crossing).

p. 114 *māyā* : mysterious power of God or the gods; e.g., the power to create an illusion for men; in philosophy it signifies the unreality of the world as opposed to and compared with the reality of God, the Absolute.

p. 116 "*There is a land...*" : Rabindranath Tagore : *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*, p. 12 (No. 12).

Psalm-quotations : 71, 9; 39, 4; 39, 5; 39, 6; 39, 9-10; 102, 25-27

## Peace

### I

Indian motto : Nielsson : *Mirabai*, p. 63 (No. 47); directed to Krishna.

p. 121 *Name and Form* : *nāma-rūpa*; the world is thus characterised, as opposed to the nameless and formless Absolute.

*samsāra* : the "phenomenal world"; the course of life from birth to death and rebirth.

p. 121 *tīrthankaras* : names of the founders of the Jain religion.  
"*Samsāra is really only...*" : *Maitrī-Upanishad* VI, 34.

p. 122 *God is as the Eternal Witness* : *Sākshin*.

Psalm-quotations : 77, 19-20; 18, 4-6; 18, 16

### II

p. 128 "*Through Truth...*" : *Rig-Veda* X, 85, 1

Psalm-quotations : 118, 24; 72, 5-7; 37, 34; 62, 6

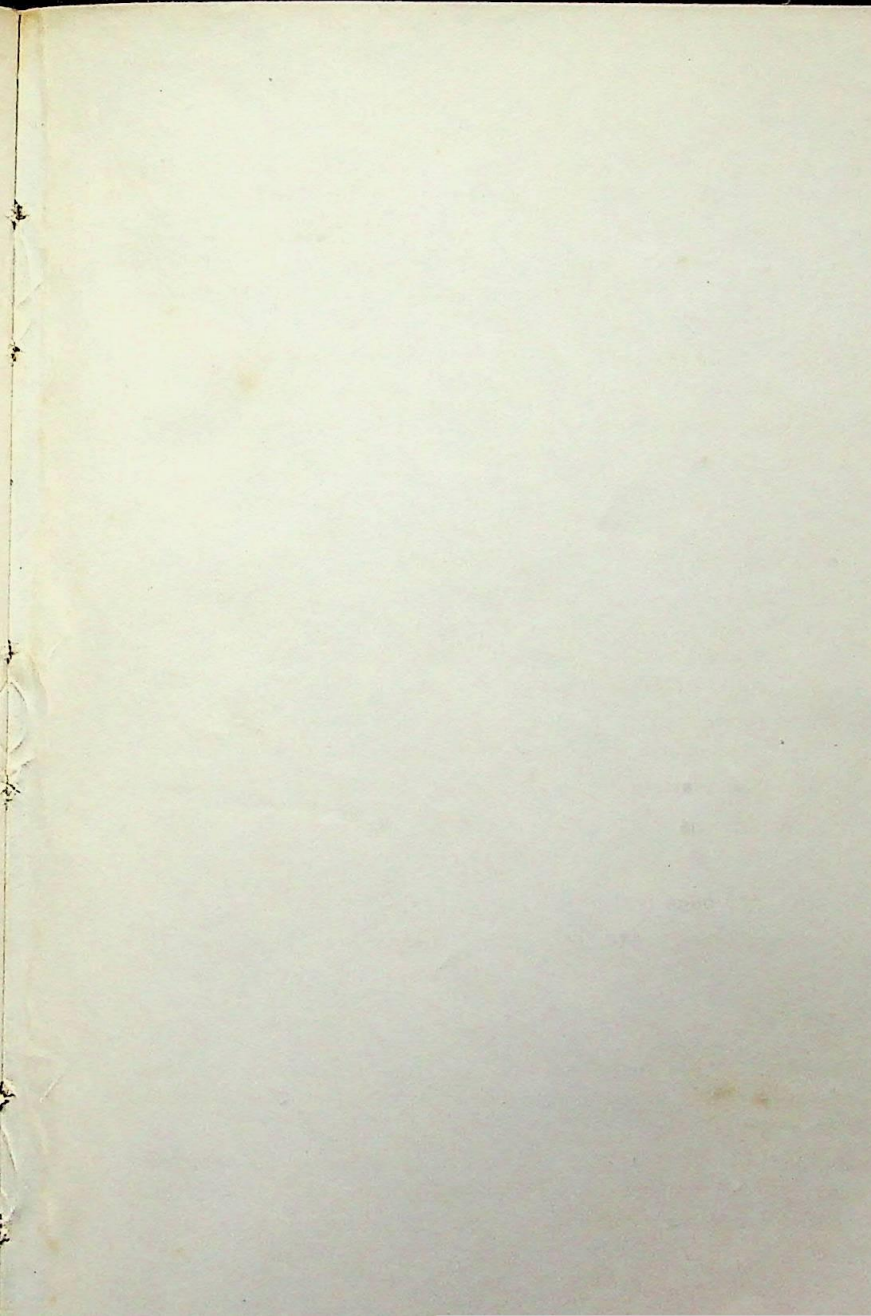
## EARTH

Woodcut : From Space, Air, Fire and Water comes Earth. She is symbolised as the sprouting seed in which all other elements are contained.

p. 134 *The farmer ploughs the earth* : This section is a paraphrase of *Atharva-Veda* XII, 1 (*Bhūmi-Sukta*).

Psalm-quotations : 103, 1-3; 4; 6; 5; 104, 14-15; 104, 27-34





## ABOUT THE BOOK . . .

We owe an explanation for why we have prepared "Indian Psalm-Meditations". At first this simply means that two people, an Indian artist and a German writer, who has made India his home, have come together and meditated on the psalms. Both love the psalms and feel — as Christians — that they respond to their religious needs. Both also love the country in which they live, and the people they share their lives with; they have studied the myths and ways of life in India for many years. This book is nothing but the result of this mingling of the spirituality of the psalms and the Indian spirit and life in the experience of an artist and a writer.

We have composed this small volume in the hope that all those who habitually read the psalms and are possibly tired of doing so, may conceive them in a fresh light, discover a new relevance in them, particularly to their Indian context. Others, who may not yet have been touched by the magic of the Psalms, or felt their depth, could perhaps find here a guide to show them how universal, how deeply human — and how Indian — the psalms are.



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